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Adopted college students' family adoption communication processes: A mixed methods study

Diana L. Baltimore
Iowa State University

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**Adopted college students' family adoption
communication processes: A mixed methods study**

by

Diana L. Baltimore

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Human Development and Family Studies

Program of Study Committee:
Sedahlia Jasper Crase, Major Professor
Mack C. Shelley, II
Corly Brooke
Steven Garasky
Amy Popillion

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2010

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to everyone who has ever been touched by adoption.

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Diana

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this mixed methods study were to examine adopted college students' adoption-related experiences, family communication processes, topic avoidance, and reasons for topic avoidance. The study utilized qualitative findings from a previous study to inform the creation of a new web-based survey instrument comprised of Likert-type, dichotomous, and open-ended response questions. A census sampling was used to collect data from all adult college students ($N=25,526$) enrolled in a midwestern public university. Descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analyses, and a MANOVA were used to analyze quantitative data and inductive analysis with open coding was employed to explore qualitative responses. Results suggest (a) many participants have engaged in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents, (b) unexplored themes emerged related to the types of topics that adopted college students avoid discussing with their parents, (c) adoptees' reasons for adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents are similar to reasons for topic avoidance in other types of relationships, (d) participants engaged in more adoption-related topic avoidance with their fathers than with their mothers, and (e) there were no differences between the frequencies of topic avoidance displayed by adopted females when compared to adopted males. Implications for practitioners, policymakers, adoptive families, and future research are recommended.

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The structure of American families has changed dramatically over the past few decades, resulting in numerous family forms. One such family structure includes those created by adoption. Adoption, the legal transfer of parental rights to a parent or parents other than those to whom a child was born (Herman, 2008; Javier, Baden, Biafora, & Gingerich-Camacho, 2007), is an increasingly common family type. In the United States (US), adoptive families are formed through a multitude of adoption types, which include (a) domestic, (b) foster care, (c) international/intercountry/transnational, (d) stepparent, and (e) kin (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). Definitions for each of these adoption types are presented at the end of this section under the heading, Definitions of Key Terms.

Despite the increasing occurrence of adoption in the US, no single, comprehensive, national data repository exists to track, monitor, and assess all types of adoption activity in the United States and its territories (Javier et al., 2007). Currently, adoption statistics are gathered in the US only for children adopted from foster care and countries outside the US. Because of this lack of uniformly-collected data, it is impossible to report exact statistics regarding children who were adopted by stepparents, by biologically-related grandparents or other relatives, by people to whom children are not biologically-related, and by those who deem a child a family member without legal or biological connections to any other member of that family. The most accurate data concerning the number of adopted children in the US is contained within the 2000 U.S. Census, which indicated that 2.5% of children younger than 18 years of age were adopted and

5.1% of all children younger than 18 years of age lived with stepparents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

On the other hand, accurate statistics are compiled for adoptions of children from foster care and from countries outside the US (international/intercountry/transnational). In 2008, more than 51,000 children were adopted from foster care with more than 127,000 children waiting to be adopted from foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). Also, in 2008 more than 17,000 children were adopted from other countries (U.S. Department of State, 2008). Based on the most recent U.S. Census records, it is estimated that there are 1.5 million adopted children in the United States (Overview of Adoption in the U.S., 2002).

Significance of Study

Because adoption is becoming more prevalent in the US, many researchers, scholars, practitioners, and lay people agree that adoption research warrants further investigation. In fact, adoption literature is lacking concerning many facets of adoption, including adoption-related family communication processes (Brodzinsky, 2006) and numerous other adoption-related processes, including but not limited to topic avoidance.

Dissertation Organization

The organization of this dissertation follows the traditional dissertation format and is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 1 contains the introduction to adoption, the significance of the study, definitions of key terms used throughout this study, my perspectives and assumptions concerning this topic, and a statement about the research approach. It concludes with the study's purpose, problem statement, and research questions.

Chapter 2 synthesizes literature pertaining to (a) adoption, (b) communication, (c) the theoretical framework applied to the current study, (d) family adoption communication

processes, (e) the Family Adoption Communication (FAC) model (Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2003), and (f) topic avoidance.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, study design, reflexivity statement, and data analysis. This chapter also includes indicators of rigor and trustworthiness, the survey mode and its constructs, and information concerning the participants, target population, sampling frame, pilot tests, and ethical issues.

Chapter 4 details the qualitative and quantitative results of the study for each research question and contains additional findings not related to the research questions. The respective themes and subthemes are listed for adoption-related topics that adoptees avoided discussing with their parents, reasons adoptees engage in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents, communication differences between adopted males and females with their mothers and fathers, and additional findings that emerged.

In Chapter 5, the discussion, limitations, and implications resulting from this study's findings are outlined. Finally, the appendices contain (a) the survey instrument, b) e-mail correspondence to potential participants, c) an example of open-coding, (d) a visual depiction of the analysis, (e) IRB materials, (f) a sample of the researcher's notes, and (g) a copy of the FAC model (Wrobel et al., 2003).

Definitions of Key Terms

The following are key terms and their definitions as they will be used in this study:

1. *Adoptee*: An individual who was adopted.
2. *Adoption triad*: Birth parents, adoptive parents, and adopted children.
3. *Assisted reproductive technology* (ART): For this study, ART will include all fertility treatments in which both eggs and sperm are handled and treatments in which only

- sperm are handled. These include invitro, surrogacy, intrauterine, artificial, and donor insemination (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010).
4. *Birth parent*: The biologically-related mother or father of a child.
 5. *Closed adoption type*: A level of adoption openness characterized by absolutely no contact between the adoptee, or between the adoptee's adoptive parents, and any member of the adoptee's birth family.
 6. *Domestic adoption*: The adoption of a child born in the US by adoptive parents who are also US citizens.
 7. *Foster care adoption*: The adoption of a child who was in the U.S. foster care system immediately prior to the adoption.
 8. *Intercountry/transnational adoption*: The adoption of a child who is a citizen of a country other than the US by adoptive parents who are citizens of the US.
 9. *Mixed methods design*: A research design employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches during single or different phases of the research process. This design is aligned with the pragmatic paradigm (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).
 10. *Mixed methods research*: "A research design with both philosophical assumptions and methods of inquiry" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 5).
 11. *Open adoption type*: A level of adoption openness characterized by contact between the adoptee or the adoptee's adoptive parents, with at least one member of the adoptee's birth family. Adoptive and birth family members may exchange information and know each other's identifying information, such as first and last names, residence, phone number, and so forth.
 12. *Parent*: Throughout this paper, this term will mean an adoptive parent, unless

- otherwise noted.
13. *Pragmatism*: A worldview perspective that assumes singular and multiple realities (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).
 14. *Pragmatist*: A researcher who contends that multiple worldviews or paradigms can be used to answer research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).
 15. *Sequential design*: A data collection strategy used in mixed methods designs where data collected in one phase contributes to data collected in a subsequent phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).
 16. *Stepparent adoption*: The formal, legal adoption of a child by a parent who is not biologically or legally related to the child but who is, or has been, married to the child's biological parent.
 17. *Semi-open adoption type*: A level of adoption openness characterized by the maintenance of confidentiality by all parties while all correspondence between birth family members and adoptive family members is handled by a third party, such as an adoption agency or an attorney.
 18. *Topic avoidance*: A motivationally-based communicative behavior where individuals choose not to initiate or introduce certain topics in discussions with other individuals (Dailey & Palomares, 2004)
 19. *Triangulation design*: A mixed method design that uses strengths from quantitative methods and qualitative methods to compensate for each method's respective weaknesses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Researcher's Perspectives/Assumptions

My sole concern for this study and main role as a researcher was to clearly and accurately understand adopted college students' experiences and perceptions of their family's adoption communication processes. My worldviews are consistent with those of interpretive, constructivism, and subjectivism epistemologies; I learn through interactions with others and contend individuals' perceptions define their realities. My thesis research, entitled, *Understanding the concept of adoption: A qualitative analysis with adoptees and their parents*, employed a phenomenological methodology to explore adopted children's and adoptive parents' experiences with adoption. Results from my thesis revealed there may be unanswered, adoption-related questions children do not ask their parents. However, due to the sensitive nature of interviewing children and constraints set forth by the Institutional Review Board, I was not granted permission to probe the children's responses to better understand their experiences. Thus, findings from my thesis informed and served as a base for this dissertation. Thus the current study employed a mixed methods design consisting of a newly devised web-based survey instrument comprised of close-ended (quantitative) and open-ended (qualitative) questions to determine generalizability of findings from the children interviewed in my thesis to adopted college students.

In qualitative research, the researcher is an active participant in the data collection process and thus becomes a part of the research. Thus, it is crucial to address my personal beliefs and experiences as the primary researcher so others can understand the lenses through which I interpreted the results. I earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology, a minor in Child-Parent Community Services, and a Master of Science degree in Human Development and Family Studies from a research extensive institution; currently, I am a doctoral candidate in Human

Development and Family Studies at a research extensive institution. I am also a female, Caucasian adult who was adopted in the US as an infant, the adoptive parent of a child who was born in the US and adopted as an infant, and an adult who has found her biologically-related family members. I was reared in a family with one adopted brother and I have always been interested in the topic of adoption. However, my curiosity about adoption was extremely heightened when we adopted our daughter. It was not until our daughter asked if she came out of my tummy that I began questioning this extremely complex construct. Specifically, I pondered adoption-related experiences, thoughts, word choices, social stigmatizations, media portrayals, communications, and misperceptions (Kline, Karel, & Chatterjee, 2006; March, 1995; Miall, 1987; Wegar, 1997, 2000). More important, my biggest concern was, “How do we ensure that our daughter does not feel any less a member of our family because she is adopted, especially since we have one biologically-related son?” Other ongoing questions I have are (a) How do we help our daughter understand that being adopted is a positive method of becoming a family, despite the less-than-favorable portrayals of adoption in the media and in our culture (Creedy, 2000)? (b) How do we ensure that she does not feel she was unwanted by her biologically-related parents? (c) How do we ensure that she knows and understands she was part of a bigger plan for all of us? (d) How do we convey all of this to her in a positive manner, which will help her comprehend such a complicated phenomenon, especially considering the fact that US societal constructs of adoption have historically been less than favorable? (e) How do other families deal with this multifaceted issue? Especially since it is misunderstood by so many adults, professionals, and researchers, let alone children; and finally, (f) How do other families experience this phenomenon in terms of family communication processes?

As a researcher, adult adoptee, and an adoptive parent, I have personal knowledge concerning many facets of adoption; I have developed my own understandings of how an adopted child, an adoptive parent, an adult adoptee, and my own family experiences adoption and adoption-related family communication processes. I also understand adoption from the perspective of a researcher who has gathered information from other adoptive families. Moreover, my experiences as an adoption researcher have guided the research questions formulated for this current study. Because of my prior experiences with adoption, it was crucial for me to critically evaluate my own experiences, biases, and judgments on an ongoing basis as I proceeded through this study in order for me to remain open to alternative thoughts, opinions, and judgments from all participants--especially any emergent ideas, thoughts, or opinions that differed from my own. Thus, I continually wrote down my thoughts, ideas, perceptions, and biases throughout this research. I believe this study was strengthened by my personal experiences as an adoptive parent and an adopted individual, because I have experienced this phenomenon in a role similar to these participants.

Research Approach

The current study employed a mixed methods research design. Mixed methods is a research design aligned with the pragmatic paradigm—it assumes there are multiple, legitimate approaches to social inquiry and that any one approach to such inquiry is inevitably partial (Greene, 2008). This approach was identified as the best method to answer the research questions posed in the current study because it was expected to elicit more information than what was derived from the first phase of the research—the initial qualitative inquiry (Baltimore, 2007). Mixed methods research designs use both quantitative and qualitative data to generate important perspectives that would not be accomplished with one method or the other (Greene, 2008). The

philosophical assumption of this approach is that the weaknesses of each approach can be supported by the strengths of the other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). For instance, the current study implemented a sequential design, a data collection strategy wherein data collected in one phase contributes to data collected in a subsequent phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Hence, results from my thesis (phase 1; Baltimore, 2007) informed the creation of the research questions, survey, and data collection processes used in phase 2 (this current mixed methods study). The phases of this study are displayed in the methodology section (see Figures 1 and 2). The current study employed one type of mixed methods research, a triangulation design, whereby both quantitative and qualitative data were utilized and analyzed concurrently to complement each method's strengths and weaknesses. In conclusion, this study benefited from employing a mixed methods approach because it provided an in-depth, full picture of the complexities associated with adoption-related communication processes, which could not have been obtained by only one method of inquiry, such as solely from qualitative or quantitative responses.

Purpose and Problem Statements of Study

A review of the literature revealed there are many unknown facets concerning family adoption communication processes and topic avoidance within adoptive families has been underexplored. However, my prior thesis research demonstrated that topic avoidance may be prevalent within adoptive families (Baltimore, 2007). Thus, the purposes of this study were to elucidate family communication processes concerning adoption and to explore the possibility of adoption-related topic avoidance within adoptive families. To explore these issues, several research questions guided the study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this investigation:

1. Do adult adoptees report engaging in adoption-related topic avoidance with their adoptive parents?
2. If adoption-related topic avoidance occurs within adoptive families, what are the major themes of adoption-related topics that are avoided by adoptees with their adoptive parents?
3. If adoption-related topic avoidance occurs within adoptive families, what are the major themes of reasons that adoption-related topics are avoided by adoptees with their adoptive parents?
4. What, if any, adoption-related topic avoidance gender differences are evident between adopted females and adopted males/adoptive mothers and adoptive fathers?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter synthesizes literature pertinent to the understanding of family adoption communication processes. Specifically, the literature review includes an overview of these key components that impact adoption-related communications within adoptive families: (a) adoption, (b) communication, (c) family communication processes, (d) the Family Adoption Communication model (Wrobel et al., 2003), (e) the Communication Boundary Management Theory (Petronio, 1991, 2000), and (f) topic avoidance.

Adoption

The process of adoption has been practiced for centuries around the world. In the United States, adoption was legally recognized in the 1850's when Massachusetts passed the first adoption law. Despite its longevity, the U.S. Children's Bureau and the National Center for Social Statistics collected adoption data only between 1945 and 1975—these data were voluntarily supplied by each state and territory. Based on data collected between 1945 and 1975, yearly adoptions oscillated between a low of 50,000 adoptions in 1944 to a high of 175,000 adoptions in 1970 (Herman, 2008). Since 1975, no single national reporting database has existed to track domestic, private adoption transactions in the US. Thus, accurate statistics concerning the number of private, domestic adoptions conducted in the US do not exist for the period from 1976 through the present. Best estimates reveal that since 1975, domestic adoptions in the US have decreased, while statistics show foster care adoptions have increased dramatically, and international adoptions have increased since 1975 (U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services, 2008; U.S. Department of State, 2008). However, the number of transnational adoptions has recently decreased (Herman, 2008).

While no national clearinghouse exists to track private adoptions in the US, the most current National Adoption Attitudes Survey (2002) demonstrated that adoption is becoming an increasingly familiar family structure which touches the lives of many Americans. The 2002 survey of 1416 American adults revealed that 64% of those polled reported having a personal relationship with adoption, such as within their family or through close friends. The same Adoption Attitudes Survey executed in 1997 found that only 58% of Americans surveyed reported having a personal experience with adoption, such as a close friend or family member who had been adopted, who had adopted a child, or who made an adoption plan for a child. Despite its increasing familiarity, most researchers, scholars, practitioners, and lay people agree adoption is an extremely complex, multifaceted phenomenon, which is still not fully understood.

Children reared in families without two birth parents are becoming increasingly common. For instance, families formed through various types of adoption, such as domestic, foster care, international/intercountry/transnational, stepparent, and kin adoptions (Kreider, 2008) and assisted reproductive technologies (invitro fertilization with egg donation or donor insemination) have become more popular methods of forming families whose children are reared by someone other than a birth parent (Freundlich, 2001). Children reared in families without two birth parents may have analogous family communication processes, but different family communication processes when compared to children reared in families with two birth parents. Thus, exploring family adoption communication processes among adoptive families may provide an understanding of family communication processes that are similar for all family structures where children are reared without two birth parents.

More important, because healthy, positive family communications are imperative for the overall well-being of all children and families (Vangelisti, 2004) the subsequent literature review outlines the foundation for understanding communication in families. Then, family adoption communication, family communication processes, theoretical applications to family communication, and topic avoidance within families are discussed.

Communication

Communication, an information exchange process requiring individuals to recognize and interpret symbols via cognitive functions and agreed upon meanings (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002), has been researched extensively—family and parent-child communication processes are well-known for their impact on family well-being and child adjustment (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006; Steinberg, 2001). Also, most scholars agree families are extremely significant systems that serve as primary socializing institutions for their children (Sillars, 1995), which continue to influence their members' behaviors, attitudes, communication processes, and well-being long after children transition out of the home. In fact, Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002) contend families have the most impact on their members through communicative behaviors.

Additionally, parenting education researchers and scholars agree on the importance of parenting education for the long-term well-being of families and children. According to Carter and Kahn (1996), all parents need support in rearing children regardless of their cultural or socioeconomic position or their biological relationship to a child. Many researchers agree that families who experience adoption are no different in this regard; they need support, guidance, and education relative to normative parenting, development, identity, and communication issues (Brodzinsky, 2008; Hart & Luckock, 2004; Rosenberg, 1992).

In addition to the importance of parenting education, adoption and non-adoption research have documented that healthy parent-child communication patterns are vital for children's long-term adjustment (Brodzinsky, 2006; Burleson, Delia, & Applegate, 1995; Lanz, Iafrate, Rosnati, & Scabini, 1999). Furthermore, adoption studies illustrate the enhanced well-being of adoptive families who engage in active, ongoing, sensitive communication concerning adoption (Brodzinsky, 2006; Brodzinsky & Palacios, 2005; Nickman, 1985; Wrobel et al., 2003). Likewise, parental warmth and empathy have also been identified as factors affecting adoption-related communications and child outcomes. For instance, Kirk's (1964) early work revealed the importance of adoptive parents' empathy in discussing adoption-related issues with their children. More recent studies have expanded the understanding of parental empathy to adoptees' emotions concerning adoption-related communications, specifically the notion of communicative openness (Brodzinsky, 2006; Brodzinsky & Palacios, 2005; Neil, 2003). Communicative openness suggests that adoption-related communication processes occur and change across a family's life-span (Brodzinsky, Singer, & Braff, 1984; Jones & Hackett, 2007; Neil, 2007).

One qualitative study comprised of interviews with 10 adoptive mothers and 10 adoptive fathers revealed that communicative openness changed over adoptive families' life-span, varied significantly between children and families, and served valuable purposes. Specifically, communicative openness fostered identity development and shared family values for all adoptive family members (Jones & Hackett, 2007). In a related study, Neil (2009) identified five key elements of communicative openness, which included (a) adoption-related communications with an adopted child, (b) compassion and support of a connection between an adopted child, adoptive parents, and birth family, (c) emotional understanding and concern for an adopted child, (d) birth family communications, and (e) compassion and understanding for the birth family.

Most adoption experts agree that communicative openness is extremely valuable—it may serve as a protective factor for adopted children’s well-being (Brodzinsky, 2006) and positive identity formation (Howe & Feast, 2003). Brodzinsky (2006) explored communicative openness with adoptive parents and their 35 adopted girls and 38 adopted boys, between 8 and 13 years of age, who were adopted before they were 18 months old. The study used data derived from home visits and the completion of two assessments, which measured family communication openness, such as engaging in honest, open, and emotionally-attuned adoption-related communications, and child adjustment. Results indicated that communication openness was highly correlated with adopted children’s adjustment; children who claimed more open family adoption communication processes reported higher self-esteem and their parents reported fewer behavioral problems.

Other studies have documented benefits of communicative openness—adoptive families displaying open communication styles resulted in adolescents with fewer identity problems (Stein & Hoopes, 1985); adopted adolescents who felt more trusting of, and closeness with, their parents said they had better overall family functioning (Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2002); adult adoptees who engaged in open communications with their adoptive parents felt closer to their adoptive parents (Sobol, Delaney, & Earn, 1994); and adoptees raised in families with open communication said they were more satisfied (Howe & Feast, 2003). A study of families who adopted children born in the United States (Wrobel, Von Korff, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2005) found that more access to adoption-related details, coupled with open, honest discussions, promoted children’s positive adoptive identity development by adolescence. In another study (Palacios & Sánchez-Sandoval, 2005), adoptive family members reported speaking about adoption very rarely in the younger years, but more frequently as adoptees became older. The authors concluded that adoption-related communications tended to increase during adolescence

when adoptees ask more questions. Despite existing adoption-related communication research, few studies extend the understanding of how communication within families rearing children who are not biologically-related to at least one of their primary caregivers should unfold across the life-span. Therefore, adoption researchers, scholars, practitioners, and experts should continue to explore methods that foster open, honest, empathic, lifelong family adoption communication processes and promote adoptees' self exploration (Brodzinsky, 2006). A better understanding about how adoption-related communication unfolds and how it can be strengthened may serve as an impetus for parenting education initiatives that can enhance adoptive family members' communication processes and thus their overall well-being.

It is also fairly well-agreed upon that gender differences exist concerning male and female communications (Tannen, 1990; 2001; Wood, 2001). Research has consistently shown that mothers communicate with their children more openly than do fathers (Golish & Caughlin, 2002; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995b; Rosnati, Lafrate, & Scabini, 2007). For instance, DiIorio, Kelley, and Hockenberry-Eaton (1999) discovered that adolescent males and females were more likely to discuss sexual issues with their mothers than with their fathers. Consistent with these findings, others (Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, & Perry, 2006) reported that females felt less able to talk to their father about their problems, when compared to their male counterparts. On the other hand, females and males did not differ in their comfort level of talking to their mother about problems. Many similar studies have uncovered communication gender differences between male and female children and their mothers and fathers, regardless of their family's structure.

Similarly, in a study of adoptive families (Wrobel, Ayers-Lopez, Grotevant, McRoy, & Friedrich, 1996), gender differences may have influenced how males and females react to their parents' adoption-related communications. Researchers concluded that gender may be

reciprocally related to each family's interactions, thus creating differences in how parents rear their adopted sons and adopted daughters. Thus, children's reactions to their parents and to their family, coupled with their family's climate regarding adoption-related communications, might differ for adoptive families based on the adoptee's gender.

Another study (Freeark, Rosenblum, Hus, & Root, 2008) examined factors that affect how parents who adopted children from countries outside the US discuss adoption with their children. Adoptive couples ($N=66$) completed the Couple's Adoption Interview (Rosenblum & Freeark, 2000), a semi-structured, open-ended interview to share their recollections of adoption-related communications they had with their children and assessments of how they believed their children understood adoption. Children, 31 females and 35 males, ages 4 to 7 years, were individually interviewed without their parents present; parent dyads were interviewed together. Results demonstrated that mothers engaged in more adoption-related communications with their young children, when compared with their adoptive father counterparts. Also, mothers who believed that rearing adopted children is different from rearing biologically-related children discussed adoption more frequently with their children than did mothers who believed that rearing adopted children was the same as rearing biologically-related children (Freeark et al., 2008).

In addition to gender differences in communication, the phase 1 qualitative inquiry (Baltimore, 2007) with children adopted before 18 months of age, comprised of 5 males and 4 females, between the ages of 5 to 14 years, revealed that the three oldest females (ages 8-13 years) had adoption-related curiosities they had not communicated to their parents (Baltimore, 2007). For instance, in response to the question, "Is there anything you don't like about being adopted?" Child 7 (11-year-old female) answered, "I have to wait seven more years before I get

to see my real parents.” Child 7’s mother was surprised at her comment because Child 7 had never communicated any desire to meet her birthparents. Here is her mother’s reaction:

You know about what (Child 7) said about waiting until she was 18 to find them (birth parents)? She has never, ever once brought that up as an issue. I had no idea.... (Child 7) has never said (anything about finding her birth parents until this interview).... That was very interesting (that Child 7 told you she wanted to meet her birth parents) because she had never said that. Yeah, it was interesting because she had never said it! (Baltimore, 2007, p. 79)

According to Mother 8, adoption is not really discussed in their family, “...I have no idea if anyone else talks about it but we really don’t, they are just our children.... We don’t even talk about it (Baltimore, 2007, p.79).” However, her daughter (13 years old) told me that she has questions about her circumstances that she has not discussed with her parents:

I’d personally like to know if my parents, birthparents, are still alive.... And, where exactly they lived and the exact age of when was I adopted, not just the general (age).... Yeah, and I would also like to go to Korea. I’d like to see them.... I used to (ask questions) and now, but now, there aren’t very many questions to ask them so we’ve not talked about it. I’ve only brought it up once or twice but other than that it’s pretty, you know. (Baltimore, 2007, p. 80)

Based on these interviews, it appears Child 8 was curious about her adoption and has unanswered questions regarding her adoption that she has never communicated to her parents. For instance, she wants to travel to her birth country to meet her birth parents, but their family has never discussed her birth parents.

Also, one 9-year-old female indicated she wanted to know what her birth dad looks like. However, neither her mother nor her father could ever recall any conversation where she discussed her biological father. On the other hand, the oldest males in the phase 1 study (Baltimore, 2007) said they do not have questions about their adoptions. These findings are congruent with the notion that adolescents tend to have more questions about their adoption-related circumstances (Palacios & S’anchez-Sandoval, 2005), that adopted children are curious

about their birth family members (Wrobel & Neil, 2009; Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 1998), and that gender differences exist in the manner in which male and female children communicate with their parents about adoption.

These findings may suggest gender differences in adoption-related curiosities, females' openness in communicating about their adoption with someone outside of their family, or males' reluctance to discuss adoption-related issues with anyone. Additionally, this study supports findings indicating that adoptees and their parents may be uncertain about how to continually talk about adoption-related topics, especially when children do not show any interest in discussing adoption-related issues (Wrobel & Neil, 2009). Furthermore, many adopted children have said that they feared broaching adoption-related topics due to emotionally upsetting their parents or creating tension within the family (Wrobel & Neil, 2009). Likewise, adoptive parents indicated reluctance in discussing adoption-related topics with their children because they perceived their children were not interested in discussing these issues (Wrobel & Neil, 2009).

Prior studies have demonstrated the necessity of communicative openness among all family types. However, further examination is necessary to delineate how adoptive families can achieve communication openness across their life-span, as opposed to family members inferring that adoption-related communications do not need to occur if adoptees are not asking adoption-related questions or discussing their adoption with their parents.

Family Communication Process (FCP)

In order to better understand the complexities of communication within all family structures, the Family Communication Process (FCP) theory is outlined below. Additionally, because adoptive family communication may differ from family communication within other

family types, the Family Adoption Communication model is described to explore family adoption communication processes and communication openness.

The FCP theory contends that individuals in families who have shared meanings of reality rear children who have fewer adjustment problems. Families with shared realities have more harmonious interactions, more accurate communications, and less dissension (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2004, 2006). To test the FCP theory within adoptive families and to assess adopted adolescents' adjustment, Rueter and Koerner (2008) examined 592 families with two parents, one adolescent, and a younger sibling who was within 5 years of the adolescent's age. The sample was comprised of families in which both children were adopted ($n=284$), only the adolescent was adopted ($n=100$), and both children were biologically-related to their parents ($n=208$). Results demonstrated that poor child adjustment was related to family communication that lacked parental control, despite family type. On the other hand, adopted adolescents reared by controlling, uncommunicative (protective parental types) or indifferent, neglectful parents (laissez-faire parent type) had higher propensities for developing adjustment problems when compared to nonadopted adolescents. Further, they hypothesized that biologically-related family members may be more adept at creating shared realities than adoptive families due to feeling a sense of belonging to family members who look alike and possess similar characteristics due to genetic relatedness (Rueter & Koerner, 2008). They concluded that the FCP theory may not adequately account for communication processes within adoptive families, or other families who are not genetically related. In summary, the FCP theory may not be applicable to all family types, especially children reared by a non biologically-related family member. Thus, ensuring optimal child outcomes may require different parental communication processes, based on the relatedness of parents and children.

Family Adoption Communication Processes

Because understanding communication within families is extremely important to enhancing the well-being of all families and children, including adoptive families and families rearing children without two birth parents, the Family Adoption Communication model is outlined to better explain family adoption communication processes

Communication is a significant task for all families, and adoption-related communication is a prominent, dynamic process all adoptive families experience (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002) over the course of their life cycle (Nickman et al., 2005). Adoption-related communication within families has been researched for years; however, much is still unknown about this process. For instance, it is unclear how adoption-related communication processes occur, such as how much adoption-related information parents should share with their children, how parents should tell their children adoption-related facts, and when parents should reveal specific adoption-related issues to their children (Baltimore, 2007; Nickman et al., 2005).

Conclusions from one study (Brodzinsky, Singer, & Braff, 1984) suggested that families provide adoption-related information relative to each child's developmental abilities, especially cognitive functioning. The study of 200 adopted and non-adopted children, 4-13 years old, demonstrated that most adopted preschool children did not fully understand the concept of adoption despite the fact that they were labeled adopted by their parents. The research revealed very few differences in non-adopted and adopted children's comprehension of adoption over time. Consequently, the researchers (Brodzinsky et al., 1984) recommended that additional empirical research explore adoption-related communication to provide more specific and realistic guidelines regarding how, when, and what is told to children who are adopted. Furthermore, the majority of researchers contend it is imperative to take into account children's cognitive

developmental changes when exploring adoption-related communication processes with children (Baltimore, 2007). Despite these recommendations, there are no guidelines outlining when or how it is appropriate to tell certain facts to adopted children and how to judge each child's unique understanding, emotional preparedness, and cognitive functioning related to receiving adoption-related information.

The phase 1 study of 16 adoptive parents revealed that 5 out of 8 families reported only revealing certain facts adoption-related facts to their children, based on their children's ages and cognitive abilities (Baltimore, 2007). Following are a few parents' comments supporting this notion. Father 1 declared:

"We have not specifically talked to him (male child, 5 years of age) about that (facts surrounding adoption)....Ah, probably for two reasons. Number one because of his age and number two, he really hasn't asked....It's not the fact that we're trying to withhold it... It's just the fact he is, you know, and that uh, I'm not sure how much he'll understand of it....Of course, (male child, 5 years of age) is too young. It will be very interesting to see as (he) develops more cognitive skills." (Baltimore, 2007, p. 77)

Additionally, Mother 4 said, "He (male child, 7 years of age) knows there is a birth brother. He knows his birth mother could not take care of him. Any other details, we've kind of kept back for a little bit later" (Baltimore, 2007, p. 77). And, Mother 7 explained, "...There are a few issues that we feel she (female child, 11-years of age) needs to be more mature to discuss. So, when she gets older we'll discuss those things....We pretty much point blank tell people that we will tell the girls when they're 18 (years old)..." (Baltimore, 2007, p. 77). Thus parents from phase 1 appear to acknowledge the importance of considering their children's cognitive developmental abilities, and choose not to disclose certain information to their children due to their age and cognitive abilities. On the other hand, it may be that these parents do not know how or when to talk to their adopted children about specific facets concerning adoption. These findings are consistent with other communication studies comprised of adoptive families. For

example, Jones and Hackett (2007) reported parents' qualitative statements regarding their communicative openness concerning their adopted children's reunions with, or desire to meet, a birth parent. Emergent themes from the study revealed unspoken agreements about what adoptive parents and their children discuss relative to the children's birth parents. The authors concluded that barriers to communicative openness may exist between adoptees and their adoptive parents, for a multitude of reasons. One plausible reason that certain adoption-related topics were not broached was mutual concern for feelings of all parties involved, such as an adoptee's desire to search for his or her birthparents may elicit hurtful feelings for adoptive parents. Certainly, unspoken rules and concern for all parties' feelings regarding communications about birth families are not related to children's cognitive functioning and abilities to understand adoption-related facts. Thus, evidence suggests that additional reasons exist for how, why, and when adoption-related communication processes occur, and for which there are no guidelines.

Due to the widespread acknowledgment that much remains unknown about adoption-related communication within families, researchers developed a conceptual model that delineates stages of family adoption communications. This conceptual framework, known as the Family Adoption Communication (FAC) Model (Wrobel et al., 2003), outlines family adoption communication processes. The formation of the model was guided by the supposition that communication within adoptive families is stimulated by children's curiosities and it must take into account children's evolving developmental abilities. Furthermore, the model assumes adoption-related communications occur when adopted children ask parents for information concerning their adoption and then parents decide how, what, and when to communicate facts to their child (Wrobel et al., 2003).

The FAC framework is comprised of three phases, each describing a key component of familial adoption communication:

Phase I: adoptive parents provide unsolicited adoption-related information to their children.

Phase II: adoptive parents respond to their adopted children's curiosities and decide what and how much to answer or withhold.

Phase III: adoptive children independently search for information to answer their own adoption-related questions (Wrobel et al., 2003).

In order to evaluate and refine the FAC model, researchers selected 10 families from 156 adoptive families comprised of adolescents who remained during the second wave of data collection from the Minnesota/Texas Adoption Research Project (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998; Wrobel et al., 2003). All participants had been adopted before their first birthdays and were between 11 and 20 years of age during data collection (Wrobel et al., 2003). Criterion for participation was based on adolescents' anticipation of, or self-report of, moving from Phase II to Phase III of the FAC model. Only families comprised of (a) parents who either withheld all available adoption-related information from their children, and (b) parents who shared all known adoption-related information with their children were selected to better understand their progression through the FAC model. Adoptive parents and their adolescent children performed a brief family interaction task, answered written questionnaires, and were individually interviewed by researchers to gather information that further explained why and how families' adoption-related communications progressed in their respective manners.

The multiple sources of data demonstrated that most families did not move out of Phase II for various reasons, such as legal or agency constraints placed on adolescents' abilities to

gather information on their own, the family's lack of facilitation or support of the adolescent in gathering additional information, or the "adolescents' curiosity had been satisfied and they were not seeking any additional information" (Wrobel et al., 2003, p. 79). Moreover, some parents indicated they purposefully kept information from their children based on their children's age, lack of curiosity, or emotionally difficult situations. For instance, one adolescent male concluded his parents had not divulged to him all of the information they knew about his adoption-related circumstances. The researchers hypothesized that this young man's family climate may have impeded him from progressing to the next FAC phase and ultimately thwarted him from asking further questions, despite his adoption-related curiosities. Additionally, the authors concluded that when adopted children sense an ambiguous family climate regarding sharing adoption-related information, children may not want to "rock the boat" (Wrobel et al., 2003, p. 78), resulting in children refraining from asking further questions, despite their curiosities.

In the same study, an adolescent emotional component of adoptive family communication was also identified, wherein adolescents chose not to ask questions to maintain their family's "status quo" (Wrobel et al., 2003, p. 78). Based on these results, the authors recommended future research to explore how emotions impact adoptive families' adoption communication and movement through the FAC phases. Also, Baltimore's (2007) findings demonstrated the likelihood of additional factors contributing to the FAC model and its processes, such as emotional components, additional actions taken by adopted children during phases II and III, and curiosities children do not communicate to their parents.

In summary, research provides evidence suggesting that families' adoptive communication processes most likely progress through stages; however, this understanding is in its infancy, appears to be multifaceted, and may include more than three phases. Despite the vast

number of communication studies, no one theory adequately addresses the complex phenomenon of family adoption communication.

Communication Boundary Management Theory

However, a literature review uncovered the Communication Boundary Management Theory (CBT), which will be applied to this study. Communication boundaries exist between most individuals. The Communication Boundary Management Theory subscribes to the notions that rule-management systems and boundary structures guide how individuals negotiate boundaries between themselves and people with whom they share private information (Petronio, 1991, 2000). Rule management systems are formed by criteria and situational contexts which help determine what private information will and will not be discussed with another individual (Petronio, 2000). These rules are dependent on the individuals' relationships, emotional components such as embarrassment or fear, and the content of the information (Petronio, Reeder, Hecht, & Ros-Mendoza, 1996). Moreover, boundary structures define individuals who are and who are not allowed access to private information (Petronio, 2000). Boundary structures range from closed, where very little information is shared, to open, where more information is exchanged, between particular individuals. For example, a study of 38 children (32 females, 6 males) ages 7- to 18-years old who had received therapy for sexual abuse supported the CBT (Petronio, Reeder, Hecht, & Ros-Mendoza, 1996). Researchers found that children and adolescents communicated with others regarding their sexual abuse based on their perceived rules and boundary structures with those individuals. Specifically, when children deemed another person as being supportive and sympathetic, children were more apt to disclose information concerning their abuse (Petronio et al., 1996). The results also showed that conditions conducive for children discussing their sexual abuse included children feeling comfortable in their

environment and disclosing a little information at a time to assess the other person's receptiveness. Additionally, children engaged in boundary protection, such as refraining from discussing their abuse with people they did not trust and with individuals who did not appear to be understanding of their situation. Participants explained that they did not communicate about their abuse with others for various reasons, such as self-protection, perceiving a lack of permission to talk to the other person, and believing that the other person was not genuinely concerned or trustworthy (Petronio et al., 1996). These findings demonstrated that children were reluctant to disclose information about their sexual abuse when they were concerned about the effect the information would have on other individuals and when they surmised the disclosure would result in a sense of losing control (Petronio et al., 2006).

The results of the Petronio et al. (2006) study suggest that families and people in other types of relationships establish boundaries which serve many functions; moreover, the study shows that children learn communication boundary rules early in relationships. These findings may also be applicable to how adoptive family members discuss adoption-related information based on members' perceived rules and boundary structures. For instance, if family members perceive a lack of permission to discuss certain topics, such as adoption, members may avoid such conversations. Likewise, if family members perceive that their conversations may not be well-received by another family member, they may not broach the topic to protect themselves or the relationship. Due to the complexities of adoption-related communications, the CBT may help understand how, when, why, and how much adoption-related information is discussed between adoptive parents and their adopted children.

Based on the previously-cited studies, it appears necessary to determine what types of communication processes occur within adoptive families, how boundaries and rules may affect these processes, and how the CBT may be applied to adoptive families. Hence, this present study will explore adopted college students' communication processes with their adoptive parents to determine the students' levels of overall communicative openness; it will also seek to determine what, if any, adoption-related issues adopted college students have avoided discussing with their parents (topic avoidance), the reasons for avoiding certain adoption-related topics, and what, if any, gender differences exist between adopted males' and adopted females' adoption-related communications with their mothers and their fathers.

Topic Avoidance

Topic avoidance is a motivationally-based behavior where individuals choose to not discuss certain topics with other individuals (Dailey & Palomares, 2004). A comprehensive but not exhaustive review of the literature revealed little or no research existing on topic avoidance within adoptive families. However, new findings (Baltimore, 2007) suggest topic avoidance may occur in adoptive families.

Though there is a lack of literature concerning topic avoidance in adoptive families, topic avoidance has been studied among various family structures and different types of interpersonal relationships, such as parent-child (Golish, 2000; Golish & Caughlin, 2002; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a, 1995b), stepparent-young adult (Golish & Caughlin, 2002), families created through donor assisted reproduction (Paul & Berger, 2007, 2008), dating relationships (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004), and friendships (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998). Due to the broad nature of topic avoidance, research has shown that individuals avoid discussing a multitude of topics with others, such as sexuality issues (Golish & Caughlin, 2002; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a),

conversations about the other parent in stepparent families (Golish, 2003; Golish & Caughlin, 2002), how children were conceived in donor assisted reproductive families (Paul & Berger, 2007, 2008) and past relationships (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998). Likewise, individuals avoid discussing certain topics for a variety of reasons, such as to avoid conflict and to protect oneself (Golish & Caughlin, 2002), to develop bonds (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004), to preserve relationships (Caughlin, & Afifi, 2004), and to protect others (Afifi, Caughlin, & Afifi, 2007). Studies have also documented gender differences related to topic avoidance (Golish & Caughlin, 2002; Paul & Berger, 2007, 2008). Finally, evidence suggests that topic avoidance may enhance relationship satisfaction and may serve necessary and positive relational functions, by protecting others (Caughlin & Afifi, 2004), avoiding conflict (Golish & Caughlin, 2002), and safe-guarding oneself and relationships (Caughlin & Afifi, 2004; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995b).

An early investigation of topic avoidance among child-parent and sibling relationships (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a) provided a foundation for topic avoidance research among various family structures and relationships. Participants (98 females and 71 male high school and college students, ages 17- to 24- years old) completed questionnaires regarding topics they avoided discussing with their mother, father, sister, and brother, and the reasons they avoided the topics. Participants reported topic avoidance with each family member on these issues—dating, friendships, sexual activity, relationships, and negative life events.

The results were noteworthy. First, gender differences were identified. Specifically, participants engaged in more topic avoidance (a) with males than with females when discussing negative events and dating issues, (b) when talking about sexuality issues with the opposite sex, (c) if they were male, and (d) with their fathers. However, participants reported avoiding fewer

topics with their fathers as the participants became older (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a) regardless of the child's gender.

Second, participants' reasons for topic avoidance varied depending on the type of relationship and gender of all parties involved. For instance, these young people avoided discussing topics with males due to their perceptions that their partner (significant other) may not respond to them (partner unresponsiveness). On the other hand, they did not broach topics with their parents for relationship protection and because they deemed certain issues to be socially unacceptable to discuss with their parents (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a).

In sum, the study found differences in topic avoidance based on gender of the participant and the other person, type of relationship, reasons for topic avoidance, and issues subject to topic avoidance. For instance, males avoided broaching topics more frequently than did females, male family members were avoided more frequently than were female family members, participants avoided discussing fewer topics with their mother, and participants talked about more risky topics with their siblings compared to with their parents. Thus, topic avoidance among high school- and college-aged participants appeared to be dependent on the type of relationship, the topic at hand, and the gender of all individuals involved.

Guerrero and Afifi (1995b) also conducted survey research with 90 participants to assess their conversational topic avoidance with their mothers and their fathers. Participants were comprised of preteens (16 males, 14 females), teens (14 males, 16 females), and young adults (15 males, 15 females); each participant completed two surveys regarding topic avoidance—one for their mother and one for their father. Results illustrated that the teenagers (average age of 16.3 years) engaged in more topic avoidance compared with the other two age groups of participants. Overall, when participants were asked about disclosing their feelings to their

parents, they reported engaging in more topic avoidance with their fathers than with their mothers.

This study suggested that child-parent topic avoidance is at its highest for teenagers, but decreased as teens became emerging adults. Thus, topic avoidance may function as necessary relational skills for teenagers negotiating independence from their parents and avoiding discomfort. Also, these findings indicated that children's topic avoidance with their parents was dependent on their parents' gender (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995b).

In a similar study comprised of stepparent-young adulthood relationships, gender differences in topic avoidance also emerged. Participants were from 103 families formed following divorce and had at least one stepparent they had lived with for at least 6 months over the past 8 years; 42 participants reporting experiences with their stepmother and 73 reporting experiences with their stepfather. Telephone interviews of 115 participants (71 females, 44 males) between 13-22 years old (average age of 18.7 years) were conducted to determine young adults' and adolescents' topic avoidance with each parent and stepparent (Golish & Caughlin, 2002). Guerrero and Afifi's (1995b) topic avoidance scale was used in conjunction with open-ended questions to probe about topics participants purposefully avoided with their mother, father, and stepparent.

Results showed that females were more avoidant than males with their fathers and all participants were most avoidant with their stepparents, less avoidant with their fathers, and least avoidant with their mothers. No gender differences were found concerning stepparent avoidance. Open-ended responses also indicated that adolescents and young adults typically did not discuss issues with their parents and stepparents to avoid conflict. Participants said they avoided certain topics because they deemed them to be socially inappropriate to discuss, feared their parents'

unresponsiveness, wanted to protect themselves, and wanted to protect their relationships. These findings suggested that talking about certain topics may be risky and dependent upon the individuals involved and their relationships with one another. Results also revealed that topic avoidance is typically related to participants' own reasons and contextual factors. For instance, some participants did not discuss certain topics with their stepparents to reduce feelings of sadness or betrayal while others avoided talking about issues because they felt it was inappropriate to discuss the topic with their parents or stepparents. These reasons might also be evident within adoptive families, as well as many other family types.

Similarly, Paul and Berger (2007) sampled 69 adults, 21-34 years old, conceived through donor insemination to study topic avoidance. The sample was mostly female (85%), Caucasian, and born into two-parent families (78%). The researchers concluded that topic avoidance related to the participants' mode of conception was higher than other frequently avoided topics, such as sex, dating, and relationships. Participants also said that their fathers were more avoidant than were their mothers. Because mothers were the only biologically-related parent to these participants, the researchers hypothesized that participants' fathers may have been more avoidant due to participants' biological relationships with mothers, as opposed to gender differences.

Using the same sample and methods as in the previous study Paul and Berger, (2008) asked participants to complete Guerrero and Afifi's (1995a) topic avoidance scale and a revised version of the scale to report whether or not participants detected topic avoidance from their mother and other parent with whom they were reared. Participants reported what topics they believed their parents avoided discussing with them, which included every day topics such as sex, dating, and relationship issues and those related to their mode of conception. Participants also completed a self-report family functioning instrument. Over half (56%) of the participants

said they were informed of how they were conceived after 16 years of age and 18% were informed when they were younger than age 5. . Additionally, 20% were told of how they were conceived by both parents and 71% were told only by their mothers.

Results concluded that mothers' overall topic avoidance was the most significant predictor of participants' assessment of their overall family functioning. Specifically, participants who indicated that their mothers engaged in less open communications with them on a variety of topics, including, but not limited to their mode of conception, reported poorer family functioning compared to participants who deemed their mothers' overall conversations as being more open. Despite the majority of participants (56%) being told of their mode of conception at an older age (16 years or older), participants' family functioning assessments were related to how open participants considered their mothers were with them on a multitude of topics. Moreover, participants who were told by both parents about how they were conceived reported higher family functioning. Hence, mothers' overall openness and both parents' discussions about donor insemination with these emerging adults increased the participants' reports of higher family functioning.

Topic avoidance has also been linked to relationship satisfaction. Caughlin and Afifi (2004) explored reasons for topic avoidance and overall relationship satisfaction. The sample consisted of 114 parent child dyads (mean ages of 48.75 years and 20.12 years, respectively) and 100 heterosexual dating partners (20-57 years old).

Participants expressed their own reasons for topic avoidance and how much they thought their parent or partner avoided discussing certain topics. The most prevalent reasons for topic avoidance were social inappropriateness of the issue, relationship protection, and lack of closeness in the relationship. These results also provided evidence that topic avoidance can

enhance overall relationship satisfaction by increasing comfort and a sense of independence, while reducing conflict. Among parent-child relationships, partners' intentional avoidances of discussing issues were related to less satisfying relationships. On the other hand, when dating couples perceived their partners' avoidance resulted from a desire to protect the relationship, partners revealed more satisfaction (Caughlin & Afifi, 2004). Additionally, females reported less relationship satisfaction when they thought their partners avoided topics due to a lack of closeness in their dating relationship. Therefore, an association appears to exist between reasons for topic avoidance among parent-child and dating heterosexual relationships and relationship dissatisfaction. More important, this study supports the notion that all relationships have boundaries and rules, which may result from cultural standards, values, relationship types, and relationship expectations.

In conclusion, research has shown topic avoidance occurs within many types of relationships, concerning a multitude of topics, and for a variety of reasons. Evidence also suggests that certain types of topic avoidance enhanced relationship satisfaction and served necessary and positive relational functions, such as protection for others (Caughlin & Afifi, 2004), conflict avoidance (Golish & Caughlin, 2002), and protection for self and relationships (Golish & Caughlin, 2002). Furthermore, there are gender differences in topic avoidance with females disclosing more than males (Golish & Caughlin, 2002), and sons and daughters feeling more comfortable discussing topics with their mothers than with their fathers (DiIorio, Kelley & Hockenberry-Eaton, 1999; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). In sum, topic avoidance is multi-faceted and affects the well-being of relationships via rules and boundaries (Petronio, 1991).

Despite the overall complexity of adoption, communication, and topic avoidance, less research has examined if, how, and why topic avoidance occurs within adoptive families.

Because previous literature indicates that adoption-related communication within families is a complex issue that requires further examination, the current study will begin to fill gaps in current research literature by exploring whether or not topic avoidance occurs in adoptive families, and if so, what major themes of adoption-related issues and reasons for topic avoidance exist within these participants' families. In order to address these issues, the subsequent section outlines the research questions and methodology employed in the current study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the study's research questions, explains mixed methods research, and describes the methods used to develop the instrument, employ the procedures, recruit participants, and collect and analyze data. It concludes with ethical considerations and limitations.

The current study was informed by a prior phenomenological exploration of adopted children and their parents (Baltimore, 2007); it was designed to investigate adoption-related family communication processes among adopted adult college students and to explore the possibility of topic avoidance within adoptive families.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this investigation:

1. Do adult adoptees report engaging in adoption-related topic avoidance with their adoptive parents?
2. If adoption-related topic avoidance occurs within adoptive families, what are the major themes of adoption-related topics that are avoided by adoptees with their adoptive parents?
3. If adoption-related topic avoidance occurs within adoptive families, what are the major themes of reasons that adoption-related topics are avoided by adoptees with their adoptive parents?
4. What, if any, adoption-related topic avoidance gender differences are evident between adopted females and adopted males/adoptive mothers and adoptive fathers?

Mixed Methods Approach

A mixed methods research design was chosen for this study because prior qualitative research (Baltimore, 2007) demonstrated that additional information was needed to understand adoptive families' communication processes; after extensive analysis, it was determined the best method for answering these research questions was to utilize both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analyses procedures. Mixed methods research enables the researcher to maximize the benefits and reduce the weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). For example, qualitative data collected from prior research (Baltimore, 2007) informed the construction of the aforementioned research questions. However, I contend that a follow-up qualitative design would not offer ample insights into how communication processes affect a large number of adopted college students and their families. Thus, a sequential mixed methods approach was used to collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data to best explore the research problem and to answer the research questions, while surveying a large number of adoptees.

The first phase of this sequential study was comprised solely of qualitative data collected from adoptive parents and their adopted children (Baltimore, 2007). A sequential study involves the first phase of the study using one type of design and the second phase of the study using a second type of design (Creswell, 2008). The second phase of data collection consisted of administering a web-based survey instrument, comprised of quantitative and qualitative questions, to all college students at a midwestern university via the students' university-issued email address. A visual depiction of a sequential mixed method design is outlined in Figure 1.

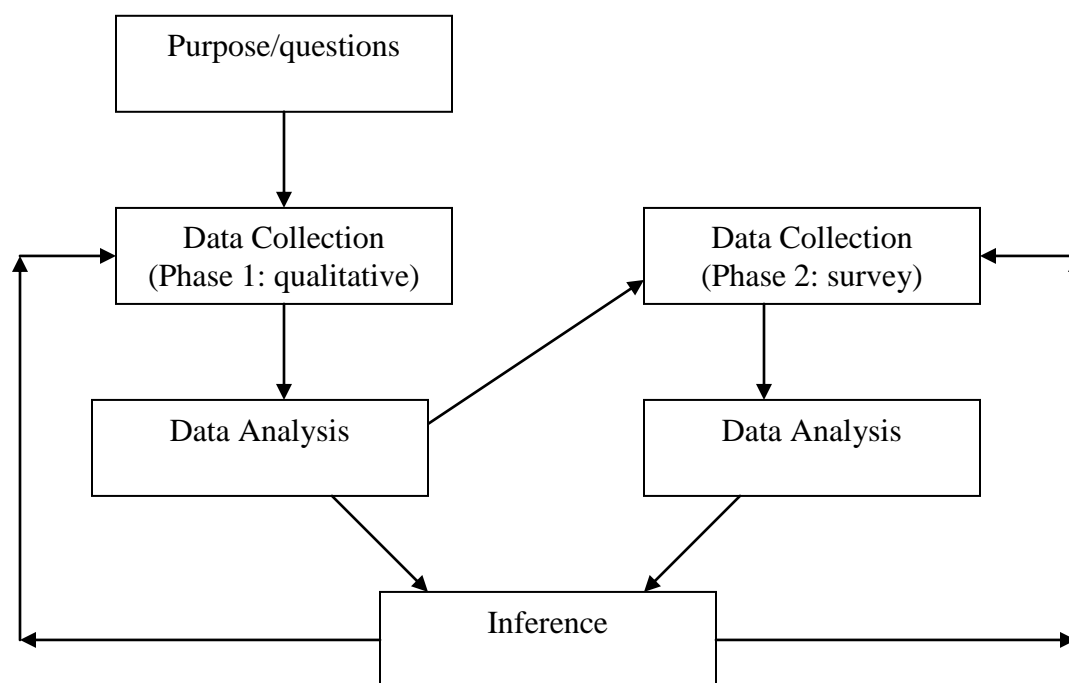


Figure 1. Phase II: Sequential Mixed Method Design. Adapted from Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; p. 688, Figure 26.7.

The third phase consisted of a triangulation design wherein data from the survey (quantitative and qualitative) were analyzed at the same time and given equal weight (Creswell, 2008). A visual depiction of a triangulation design is outlined in Figure 2. Analysis information is contained in the data analysis section of this chapter.

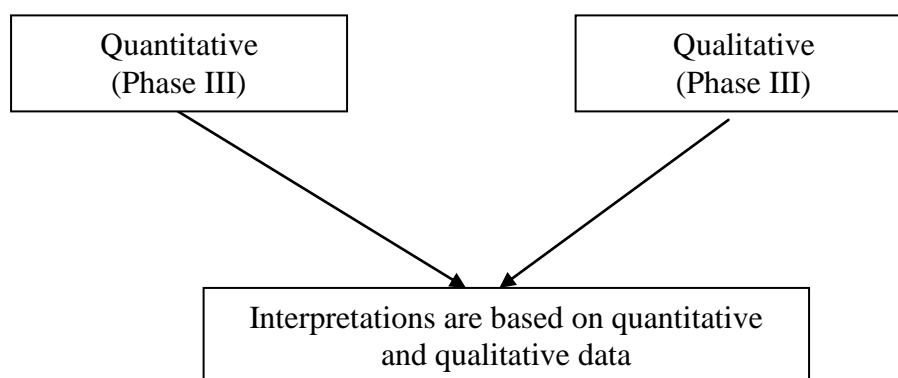


Figure 2. Phase III: Triangulation Design. Adapted from Creswell, 1998; p.63, Figure 10.3a.

Instrument Development

This research was conducted via a new web-based survey instrument, the Adoptees' Topic Avoidance Questionnaire (ATAQ) (Baltimore, 2009), designed within Surveygizmo, an online survey software program. The ATAQ was designed to (a) provide a mechanism to evaluate the research questions, (b) use with adoptees from various family types, and (c) make inferences about the phenomena of adoption, topic avoidance, and reasons for topic avoidance among adopted college students. A copy of the entire survey is located in Appendix A. The initial step in the development of the ATAQ was to identify existing research and theory concerning topic avoidance within various relationship types. The constructs of topic avoidance and reasons for topic avoidance have been measured and validated by other researchers via survey methodology (Golish & Caughlin, 2002; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a & b). However, because a review of the literature did not reveal prior research concerning topic avoidance and reasons for topic avoidance related to adoptive families, I designed new questions, based on existing surveys (Golish & Caughlin, 2002; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a & b; Paul & Berger, 2007), to explore topic avoidance in adoptive families. Hence, the definitions for the concepts measured in the ATAQ are congruent with the definitions provided in Chapter 1 under, Definitions of Key Terms.

The second step in this instrument development involved identifying the types of topics adoptees might avoid discussing with their family members. These topics were based on family adoption communication research (Eldridge, 1999; Melina, 2002; Wrobel et al., 2003; Wrobel & Neil, 2009) and my personal experiences as an adoptee.

The third step utilized survey methodology research to (a) construct the survey and design the questions, (b) conduct pre-tests, and (c) make necessary changes to improve the instrument. Last, ethical considerations are outlined.

This survey measured the constructs related to the research questions, such as adoptees' adoption-related topic avoidance with each of their adoptive parents, reasons for adoption-related topic avoidance, and adoptees' unanswered adoption-related questions. Detailed instructions were presented before each section to advise respondents about the importance of providing honest, insightful responses to reduce item non-response or inaccurate responses (Groves & Peytcheva, 2008) and to enhance participants' comprehension and recall for their responses to the survey questions (Dillman, 2000). Codes were assigned in the Surveygizmo software for all quantitative responses, thus minimizing coding errors (for example, 0 = *never avoided*, 1 = *rarely avoided*, 2 = *sometimes avoided*, 3 = *frequently avoided*, 4 = *always avoided*, 5 = *never had an adoptive mother*, and 6 = *not applicable*).

The survey used attitudinal, judgmental, and factual (Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000) and closed-ended and open-ended questions to measure adopted college students' general opinions and experiences related to adoption, topic avoidance, reasons for topic avoidance, unanswered questions, and reasons for having unanswered questions; it was comprised of 5 sections and included 37 Likert-type and 9 dichotomous (*yes-no*) rating scale questions, 14 open-ended text boxes, and 13 demographics questions for a total of 59 closed-ended responses and 14 open-ended responses.

The first section contained 7 questions regarding participants' overall opinions of adoption with a Likert-type 0-4 scale in which 4 = *completely disagree*, 3 = *generally disagree*, 2 = *generally agree*, 1 = *completely agree*, and 0 = *no opinion*. The second and third sections measured topic avoidance and contained 10 questions regarding adoptees' perceived frequency of occurrences concerning topics they avoided discussing with their adoptive mother and adoptive father, respectively, using a 0-6 scale in which 6 = *not applicable*, 5 = *never had an*

adoptive mother/father, 4 = *always avoided*, 3 = *frequently avoided*, 2 = *sometimes avoided*, 1 = *rarely avoided*, and 0 = *never avoided*. Section four contained 9 dichotomous (1 = *yes*; 0 = *no*) response questions requesting adoptees to indicate what, if any, unanswered adoption-related questions were remaining for them, using a list of provided question topics and then open-ended text boxes allowing participants to write any others of their own. The last section was comprised of 10 reasons why adoptees might not have answers to their adoption-related questions; these questions used a 1-5 Likert-type scale in which 5 = *not applicable*, 4 = *completely agree*, 3 = *generally agree*, 2 = *generally disagree*, and 1 = *completely disagree*. In addition to the scaled questions, 14 open-ended text boxes were dispersed throughout the survey and at the end of each section to afford participants opportunities to provide additional comments, thoughts, or opinions concerning each survey section.

Demographic questions, placed at the beginning and at the end of the survey included each student's

1. current age,
2. age when legally adopted,
3. age when he/she found out that he/she was adopted,
4. adoption type: 1 = *domestic*, 2 = *transnational*, 3 = *foster care*, 4 = *stepparent*, 5 = *other*,
5. level of adoption openness: 1 = *closed*, 2 = *open*, 3 = *semi-open*,
6. type of adoptive family: 1 = *two-parent*, 2 = *single-parent*, 3 = *stepparent*, 4 = *other*,
please specify,
7. gender: 1 = *male*, 2 = *female*,

8. ethnicity: 1 = *Caucasian*, 2 = *African American*, 3 = *Hispanic American*, 4 = *Asian*, 5 = *Native American*, 6 = *Middle Eastern*, 7 = *other, please specify*,
9. level of education: 1 = *less than 1 year of college*, 2 = *1-2 years of college*, 3 = *more than 2 years of college*, 4 = *Bachelor's degree*, 5 = *some graduate coursework*, 6 = *Master's degree*, 7 = *some doctoral coursework*, 8 = *Ph.D.*, 9 = *M.D.*, 10 = *other, please specify*,
10. marital status: 1 = *single, never been married*, 2 = *cohabitating with a partner*, 3 = *married*, 4 = *divorced*, 5 = *married, but legally separated*, 6 = *widowed*, 7 = *other*,
11. number of children participants currently have, and
12. number of children participants have adopted.
13. An additional question explored students' receptiveness to adopting a child in the future (0 = *no*, 1 = *maybe*, 2 = *yes*).

Additional survey methodological considerations were used to enhance the instrument design, such as:

1. the survey contained contact information for me, my major professor, and the university's IRB office to decrease the anonymity of the research being conducted but also to increase the trustworthiness of the researcher and the process,
2. the first page of the survey contained the Institutional Review Board verbiage to assure respondents of confidentiality, the right to stop at any time, and their voluntary participation,
3. the survey design was simple, without any graphics or need for scrolling, to ease the viewing for respondents who had dial-up internet access. These features should have reduced break-offs related to technological problems,

4. the word *questionnaire* was used in all e-mail correspondence, instead of the word *survey* because college students may have negative connotations of the word *survey* (Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer, & Tourangeau, 2004),
5. the survey design contained a significant amount of white space, adequate spacing, visual cues such as bold type, underlines, and shading between questions to make it easy to read and visually appealing,
6. a reasonable-sized, universal, font was used to ensure readability by different computer programs and internet speeds (Best & Krueger, 2004),
7. the survey contained definitions of words and constructs, when needed, before response options, to decrease ambiguity of how to answer or comprehend questions,
8. only related, single-barreled, questions (a question that has only one response) were placed on the same page to enhance participants' comprehension, memory, retrieval, and recall for frequencies of occurrences,
9. instructions about how to answer questions (truthfully and honestly) were outlined to evoke appropriate responses because one pitfall of self-administered surveys is that no one is available to answer respondents' questions regarding how to answer or interpret questions (Best & Krueger, 2004),
10. most response scales contained 5-7 response options, were consistently ordered throughout the instrument, and were strategically spaced for response options such as, *not applicable*, or *no opinion*, so respondents were less likely to anchor their responses or choose answers that were not factual or appeared more socially desirable,
11. 14 optional, open-ended, large question boxes were used throughout the survey to provide respondents with opportunities to voluntarily provide additional responses. The

provision of voluntary, optional, open-ended responses should have also reduced respondent burden while increasing the propensity of responses from students who wished to provide more thorough answers, thoughts, or opinions (Best & Krueger, 2004), and

12. only autobiographical questions were used throughout the survey to measure first-hand opinions and occurrences and to increase participants' memory, retrieval, comprehension, and reporting (Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000).

Survey Pilot Tests

Pilot tests were conducted prior to administering the survey instrument in order to assess and improve the instrument and to reduce item and unit non-responses (Fowler, 2002). I conducted three pilot tests of the online survey prior to its administration. One such pilot test, a cognitive interview, was conducted between a 39-year old male adoptee and me. A cognitive interview consists of the researcher reviewing the instrument with a pilot test-taker (respondent) to probe his thoughts, interpretations, and opinions about the instrument while he is completing it (Willis, 2005). Two additional cognitive interviews were individually conducted between a 64-year-old adopted male and a 42-year-old non-adopted male, each with me; one cognitive interview was conducted after the male completed the online survey and the second one was conducted while the survey was being taken online. My notes regarding the pilot respondents' cognitive interviews were used to (a) understand the thought processes of the pilot respondent to ensure questions were not overly burdensome to answer, comprehend, retrieve, or report, (b) assess the pilot respondents' self-reported topic sensitivity to assess whether or not any questions were emotionally burdensome, (c) understand how the respondents interpreted questions and responses, and (d) inquire about all opportunities for improving the entire instrument. The

cognitive interviews were also used to (a) assess each pilot respondent's ability to verbally paraphrase questions to ensure that his understanding of the question was compatible with the intentions of each question, and (b) ask the test-takers to provide definitions for constructs to ensure clarity of the definitions. The web-based survey pilot-tests helped determine (a) questions that may have been difficult to comprehend or answer, (b) technological problems, (c) the amount of time required to complete the entire instrument, and (d) all other survey improvements. I changed questions and words that were difficult for the pilot respondents to interpret, understand, or answer. Finally, my committee members provided input and recommendations for rewording questions and response scales prior to administering the survey to the target population.

Procedures

Recruitment

In order to recruit participants, I first obtained university-issued e-mail addresses of all adult students via the registrar's office. Second, the registrar's office emailed the list to the university's information technology. Third, the university's information technology service distributed the emails two different times over a two-week period. The survey was available for five weeks, beginning February 1, 2010, and ending March 7, 2010. The first email request was sent to all adult (at least 18 years of age) university students enrolled at a midwestern university during the spring 2010 semester ($N=25,526$) on Tuesday, February 9, 2010, between approximately 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. Because survey researchers recommend multiple e-mail attempts with different verbiage contained within each e-mail to evoke a higher response rate (Groves, et al., 2004), each email correspondence contained different content and subject lines to invoke participation. Because incentives typically increase participation, both emails contained

verbiage explaining that only individuals who were adopted should complete the questionnaire and that those who complete the survey could voluntarily provide their email address to be entered into a random incentive drawing to receive one of eight \$25 cash-value gift certificates (Singer, 2002). Also, a filter question was utilized at the beginning of the survey inquiring as to whether or not the adult college student was adopted. Any individual who answered “No” to the question, “Were you adopted?” was forwarded to the end of the survey and exempt from participating in the research, including a gift certificates drawing which was used as a recruitment strategy. Additional survey questions regarding the type of adoption, age of adoption, and so forth, were placed at the beginning of the survey to aid in filtering out individuals who may not have been adopted.

The second email request was sent on Tuesday, February 23, 2010, between approximately 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. The second email request was not sent to any student who requested (via email) that I remove them from subsequent email requests; it also did not include participants who completed the first survey who also provided their email addresses for the purposes of entering the incentive drawing; the second request was sent to 25,407 students. Both e-mail requests contained the survey hyperlink and verbiage outlining the purpose of the study. All e-mail correspondence was short to induce respondent participation, reduce respondent burden, and reduce overall non-response (Best & Kruger, 2004). Additional information concerning ethical considerations such as benefits, risks, and voluntary participation were also contained within the consent form at the beginning of the survey. A copy of each email cover letter and subject lines are located in Appendix B.

Sample Design

A census survey (a survey of the entire population) of undergraduate and graduate students age 18-years or over was chosen because it covers the entire target population, assuming that all students' e-mail addresses from the university's registrar's office were accurate. All e-mail correspondence inviting individuals to participate in the survey contained verbiage regarding the requirements of participation (participants must be adopted). All individuals who completed the survey were included in the sample unless they voluntarily withdraw from the research, at any time. To date, no participants have requested to be removed from this study. All data derived from participants who might withdraw or request to be removed from the research study will be destroyed and not included in any further analyses.

Additionally, it is important for survey research to report response rates. However, precise demographic data are unavailable concerning the number of adopted individuals residing in the United States because states are not required to report private domestic adoptions. Best estimations have determined there are 1.5 million adopted children in the United States, which is approximately 2.5% of all U.S. children (Overview of Adoption in the U.S., 2002). Also, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2008), about 2% of children living with two parents (1.2 million) lived with either two adoptive parents, or a combination of an adoptive parent and a stepparent, or a biologically-related parent and a stepparent. Because U.S. Census Bureau statistics included individuals adopted by stepparents, this survey allowed students who self-reported themselves as being adopted to be included in the study, including stepparent, kin, and assisted reproductive technology adoption types. In summary, adopted individuals are considered a rare population for which no cumulative, accurate data are collected. Thus, it is impossible to determine the actual number of U.S. adults who are adopted, the number of adult college

students enrolled at this midwestern university who are adopted, and ultimately it is impossible to calculate and report the target population and response rates for this research. However, it is expected that the target number of adopted adult college students at this university is small, based on the aforementioned statistics and rarity of this population. For example, if approximately 2% of the total population are adopted, then two percent of the 25,526 adult college students enrolled at this university are expected to be adopted, or 510 adopted, adult college students.

Additionally, according to Groves et al. (2004), non-response errors (not all sample members are successfully measured in the research) and undercoverage errors (elements in the target population that do not or cannot appear in the sampling frame) may occur due to adopted, adult college students who (a) may not have web-access to complete the survey, (b) may not utilize their university-issued e-mail account, (c) may not choose to not respond to the survey due to its topic sensitivity (e.g., they may have had a bad experience concerning their adoption), or (d) do not answer the entire survey for a multitude of reasons. However, the following attempts to minimize these errors were implemented within this survey and its administration (a) advising participants up front of the potential sensitivity of the topic being studied while assuring confidentiality, (b) offering incentives, (c) sending two different, repeated invitations for assistance in helping me understand adoption by completing a questionnaire, (d) surveying individuals with a higher education level via a technologically-savvy web-based survey, and (e) the association between the participants' affiliations with the university and with me (Groves et al., 2004).

This research was comprised of only one mode of administration, a self-administered, web-based survey. A mixed mode design (e.g., focus groups and a survey, interviews and a

survey, etc.) typically elicits higher response rates (Groves et al., 2004). However, the decision to use only one mode for the current study was based on numerous assessments such as (a) cost and time constraints—web-based surveys generally attract more respondents in a shorter amount of time at a lower monetary cost than other methods of administration (Best & Krueger, 2004), (b) the list of student e-mail addresses from the registrar’s office provided a concrete, known number of students who were contacted (target population) and allowed some guesstimate of the sampling frame based on the overall estimated number of adopted individuals in the United States, (c) a web survey was anticipated to be more user-friendly for this target group of college students because most college students are technologically-savvy, possess internet access, and have e-mail addresses (Best & Krueger, 2004), (d) data entry was conducted by respondents as they completed the survey which was less-time consuming, more cost effective, and less labor intensive for me, and (e) the ability to monitor ongoing progress of the survey, based on respondents’ feedback.

Survey Administration

The survey administration was conducted in the following manner in an attempt to prevent errors and increase responses (Groves et al., 2004) (a) a list of all adult undergraduate and graduate adult students’ e-mail addresses were obtained from the registrar’s office, (b) the initial e-mail correspondence to all students was sent with the survey hyperlink imbedded toward the top and contained a plea for all adopted college students to help others learn more about adoption (see Appendix B for the exact verbiage). The pleas were designed to elicit reciprocation, or the norm of social responsibility, and hence elicited students to complete the questionnaire (Tourangeau et al., 2000), (c) the survey’s affiliation with a fellow university graduate student, sent via the university e-mail service, should have resulted in an increase in

respondents' participation due to the notions of "liking," and "authority" (Groves et al., 2004), (d) the request also included the goals of the survey and information about the scarcity of adopted individuals—it was anticipated that students might be motivated to help others understand more about this rare group of individuals, (e) a lottery incentive with eight, \$25 cash-value prizes was enacted to evoke more responses (Groves, Dillman, Eltinge, & Little, 2002), (f) a completion indicator was displayed on each page to continually apprise respondents about the remaining length of the survey—this should have stimulated participants to gauge the short time constraint and to continue the survey, thus reducing break-off (Best & Krueger, 2004), and (g) two different e-mail reminders (with different subject headings) were sent to all non-respondents, which should have increased response rates.

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of 175 adopted adult college students who completed the web-based survey. Demographic data are described below.

Demographics: gender, ethnicity, and age. Of the 175 completed responses, 100% of the participants were adopted; 55% ($n=96$) were female; 40% ($n=70$) were male; and 5% did not report their gender; 71% were White ($n=117$); 18% ($n=29$) were Asian; 4% ($n=7$) were Hispanic American; 2% ($n=3$) were African American; 5% ($n=10$) reported as being "other"; and 5% ($n=9$) did not report their ethnicity. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 53 years with a mean of 23.80 years ($SD=6.943$). (see Table1).

Table 1. Summary of Demographic Data ($N=175$) for Adoption Type, Ethnicity, Gender, Age, and Family Type.

Adoption Type	#	%	Ethnicity	#	%	Gender	#	%	Age	Years	Family Type	#	%
Domestic	84	48	Caucasian	117	71	Male	70	42	Mean	23.80	Two-parent	143	81
Transnational	43	25	Asian	29	17	Female	96	58	Median	21.00	Single	1	1
Foster	8	5	Hispanic-American	7	4	Total	166	100	Range	35	Stepparent	29	16
Stepparent	34	20	African American	3	2	Missing	9	5	Max.	53	Missing	2	2
Surrogate	2	1	Other	10	6	Total	175		Min.	18			
Kin	2	1	Total	166	100								
ART	1	.6	Missing	9	5								
Total	174												
Missing	1	.6											

Adoption types and family types. Participants' adoption types are shown in Table 1.

The three largest groups by far were domestic (48%, $n=84$), transnational (25%, $n=43$), and stepparent (20%, $n=34$).

Of the 175 participants, 81% ($n=143$) reported they were adopted into two-parent married households and 16% ($n=29$) were adopted into stepparent families, the two largest categories of family types (see Table 1). It is important to note that the number of participants who were included in the sampling included more participants who were adopted by stepfathers; hence fewer participants had adoptive mothers due to the much greater instances of being adopted by a stepfather than by a stepmother.

Education. Education was measured by the number of years students had attended college; 39% ($n=65$) reported more than two years of college education; 20% ($n=34$) reported one and two years; 13% ($n=22$) had less than one year of college education; and the remaining 27.6% ($n=45$) had obtained a bachelor's degree or beyond.

Data Collection

All data were entered directly into the Surveygizmo software by each participant via codes (see Instrument Development section) assigned in the software for all quantitative

responses. When the survey was deactivated, the entire Surveygizmo data file, consisting of both quantitative and qualitative responses, was downloaded into an Excel document. I identified all missing quantitative data and deleted all cases for which 10% or more of non-demographic data were missing. A total of 281 participants logged into the survey and began to respond to the questions. Only 5 participants indicated that they did not agree to the terms of the survey and stopped at the first question. For the second question (“are you adopted”), 40 participants indicated they were not adopted and were taken to the end of the survey, leaving 236 participants. At question six (“Please choose the response that best represents your opinion of each statement. There are no right or wrong answers.”), 180 participants remained; three participants stopped completing the survey during the seventh question (“Which of the following describes the type of family into which you were adopted?”); and 175 participants completed the remaining questions. Thus, 108 participants broke-off from completing the survey by question #9.

Data Analysis

Because mixed methods research is an iterative and reiterative process, qualitative and quantitative responses were analyzed on an ongoing basis during the survey’s dissemination to discover similarities, gather richness, and determine differences between quantitative and qualitative responses for each participant and between all participants’ responses. First, in order to analyze data, these post collection processes were employed (a) coding, (b) checking, and (c) importing.

Coding. I verified coding labels for each quantitative variable. Many participants provided open-ended responses in “other” fields for responses that I recoded. For example, in response to this question, “How would you classify your adoption type?” one participant wrote,

“Domestic. I believe it was a state agency that coordinated the adoption but not sure.” Another participant responded by stating, “I was adopted from foster care through an agency.” Thus, both responses were coded as 1, because they were domestic adoptions and a code already existed for that adoption type. Every open-ended response written in the “other” field was assigned to an existing applicable code, or new categories and codes were created.

Checking. The Excel file was checked three times and corrected for missing data and coding errors. No qualitative data were deleted.

Importing. The recoded and final file, comprised solely of quantitative data, absent missing cases, was imported into SPSS software for statistical analysis. All verbatim open-ended, qualitative responses were also exported to an Excel spreadsheet in the form of a matrix to track findings, as recommended by Wolcott (1994).

Qualitative data analysis. Qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed separately, using methods appropriate for each type of data collection, which are described below. Open coding (Esterberg, 2002) was employed for all qualitative data analyses; first, I identified common words, phrases, concepts, and written responses for each participant’s open-ended responses. Then, codes were derived by reading and re-reading all written comments to arrive at common themes, words, and phrases within and between the qualitative data. This constant comparative analysis (Glaser, 1978), conducted between and within all participants’ statements, allowed me to develop themes and subthemes. A sample of the open-coding process is contained in Appendix C.

I conducted open coding and a constant comparative analysis a second time, two months later, to review and update my initial codes, categories, themes, and subthemes. A non-doctoral student, not familiar with the research, conducted an external audit of the data—a process

similar to a peer review whereby the person not familiar with the research (Creswell, 1998) assesses the analysis of all open-ended responses, codes, categories, themes, subthemes, and reviews the overall process. Additionally, one doctoral student performed an open-coding analysis (Esterberg, 2002) of all qualitative data related to each research question by independently developing codes, categories, themes, and subthemes of the data, line-by-line, participant-by-participant. The doctoral student also conducted a peer review (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of qualitative data to ensure that his codes, categories, themes, and subthemes were congruent with my analyses. One doctoral student and I discussed the categories, codes, themes, and subthemes and formulated new ones, where necessary. Then, I categorized pertinent themes and subthemes into each research question. Prominent emergent themes not related to any research question were also categorized into an Additional Findings section and reported in the results section of this paper. Participants' written responses to open-ended survey questions are also woven throughout the results to provide rich, thick descriptions of family adoption communication processes. Similarly, participants' verbatim comments enable readers to determine if they have experienced similar circumstances—an assessment of transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to other adoptees.

Additionally, I used an audit trail (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008) to document all steps, ideas, themes, key words, categories, and analysis to make the entire research process apparent to all readers. This study's audit trail included open-ended comments entered by participants, my activity log, all survey data, a peer review, and the external audit. Finally, because mixed methods research is a reiterative process using more than one data collection procedure, data triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was also employed via constant comparative analyses (Glaser, 1978) of all quantitative and qualitative responses. Specifically, qualitative and

quantitative data were analyzed separately and together to provide a complete analysis of family adoption communication processes. A visual depiction of this analysis process is in Appendix D.

Quantitative data analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS software. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate frequencies, percentages, standard deviations, and percentages of participants' answers for demographic data and variables that answered each research question. Frequencies and percentages were used to answer research questions 1, 2, and 3. In order to conduct the multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) for research question 4, frequency reports of how often participants avoided discussing adoption-related topics with their adoptive mother and adoptive father revealed three categories (no adoptive mother, no adoptive father, and N/A) for which no analysis was necessary. Therefore, the three categories were recoded as *missing items* for the MANOVA.

Exploratory factor analysis. Because the survey instrument developed for this research was new, several exploratory factor analyses were performed to examine the construct validity of various sections of the instrument. Separate principal components exploratory factor analyses with promax rotation were conducted on the responses to the 10 items asking about level of topic avoidance with mother and for the 10 items asking about level of topic avoidance with father, using the 175 completed responses. The 10 items about mother loaded positively on one general factor, which accounted for 77.0% of the variance for the factor, and the 10 items for fathers also loaded positively on one general factor, which similarly accounted for 77.4% of the variance within that factor. Table 2 shows the items and the loading of each item on the factors. These two separate factors were named Level of Topic Avoidance with Mother/Father, respectively.

Another principal components exploratory factor analysis with promax rotation was used to examine the construct validity of the 10 items asking reasons participants avoided discussing adoption-related topics with their adoptive parents. All 10 questions loaded positively on one factor, Reasons for Topic Avoidance, which accounted for 71.7% of the variance for reasons participants avoided discussing adoption-related topics with their adoptive parent(s). The items and the loadings for each item in the factor are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Factor Loading Communalities for Topic Avoidance with Mothers and Fathers and for Reasons for Topic Avoidance with Parents.

Items	Communalities for Factor: Level of Topic Avoidance With		Items	Communalities for Factor: Reason for Topic Avoidance with Parents
	Mothers	Fathers		
Any 1 question	.747	.673	Too emotional	.765
Attorney/ agency	.683	.695	Parents' negative thoughts	.784
Bio. family history	.785	.826	Change relationship	.664
Biological siblings	.730	.781	Not hurt parents	.611
Birth mom/dad	.800	.762	May not respond	.790
Inherited traits	.788	.820	Inappropriate to discuss	.730
Medical history	.693	.768	Choose not to discuss	.635
Meet 1 birth family member	.854	.765	Past painful discussions	.746
Birth family questions	.827	.874	Not close enough	.662
Search for birth family	.796	.777	Avoid conflict	.786

Extraction Method: Principal Components

MANOVA. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to examine gender differences between female and male participants' topic avoidance with their adoptive mother and adoptive father, and to explore the impact of the parents' gender by analyzing

differences between female and male participants' composite topic avoidance with their adoptive mother compared to their composite topic avoidance with their adoptive father. The mean scores for each of these comparisons are shown in Table 3. Figure 3 illustrates the *marginal mean* scores of sons' and daughters' topic avoidance with their adoptive parents.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Adopted College Students' Topic Avoidance with Mother/Father.

Topic Avoidance with Parent	Adopted Student Gender	Mean	SD	Total	Standard Error	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Mother	Male	11.30	12.80	54	1.67	7.99	14.61
Mother	Female	11.71	11.88	70	1.94	9.97	17.66
Total		11.53	12.24	124			
Father	Male	13.82	14.87	54	1.47	8.81	14.62
Father	Female	12.21	13.79	70	1.71	8.84	15.59
Total		12.91	14.23	124			

A one-way MANOVA (see Table 4) revealed a multivariate main effect for topic avoidance which came very close to statistical significance, Wilks' $\lambda = .969$, $F(1, 122) = 3.9$, $p = .051$, partial eta squared = .031. Power to detect the effect was .497. There was a marginally significant difference (.051) in the amount of adoption-related topic avoidance that adoptees (sons and daughters combined) reported with their fathers and with their mothers; overall, participants engaged in slightly more topic avoidance with their fathers than with their mothers (see Table 4).

Table 4. Within Subjects Test of All Adoptees' (Males and Females Combined) Topic Avoidance with Mothers and with Fathers to Determine Differences in Topic Avoidance with Mothers and with Fathers.

Effect		Value	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power ¹
Topic Avoidance	Wilks' Lambda	.969	3.871	.051	.031	.497
Topic Avoidance X Gender	Wilks' Lambda	.986	1.731	.191	.014	.257

¹Computed using alpha = .05

A test of between subjects effects of adopted males' and adopted females' level of topic avoidance with their parents (mothers and fathers combined) revealed no significant differences by gender of adoptees in the amount of their topic avoidance with their parents. $F(1, 122) = .067, p > .05$. Thus, male and female adoptees showed no difference in the amount of topic avoidance with their parents (see Table 5). Additional explanations of these data are contained in the subsequent section, entitled Research Question 4.

Table 5. Between-Subjects Test of Adoptee's Gender on Their Topic Avoidance with Their Adoptive Parents to Determine Differences Between Male and Female Adoptees' Topic Avoidance with Their Adoptive Parents.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power ¹
Intercept	36655.185	1	36655.185	115.051	.000	.485	115.051	1.000
Gender	21.314	1	21.314	.067	.796	.001	.067	.058
Error	38868.988	122	318.598					

¹Computed using alpha = .05

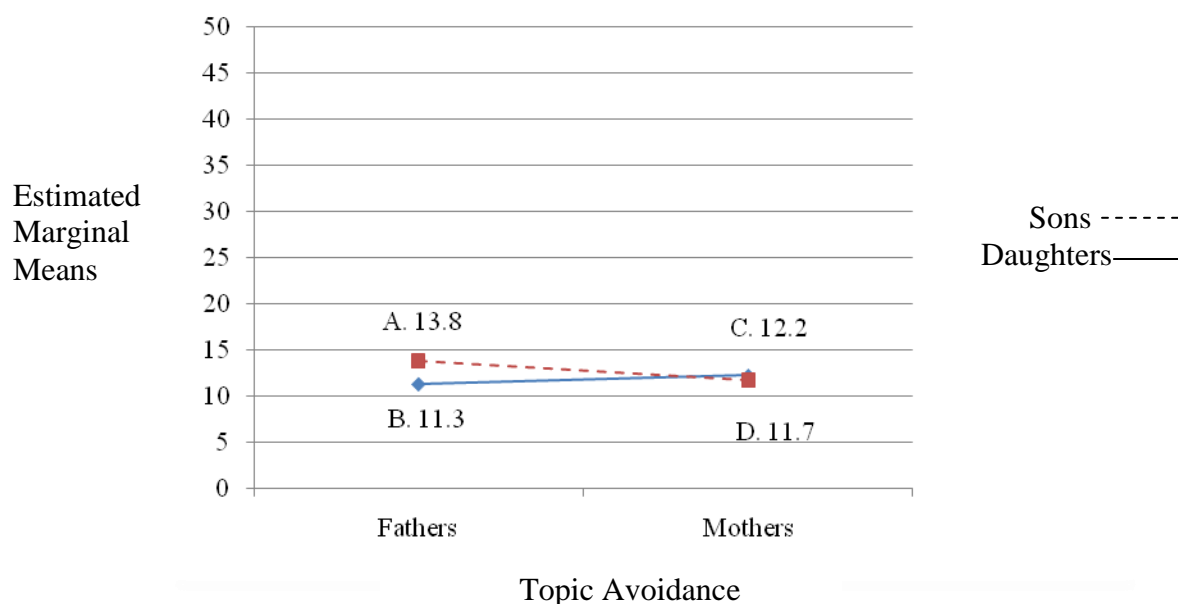


Figure 3. Estimated marginal means of topic avoidance by daughters and sons with adoptive mothers and adoptive fathers.

Ethical Issues

Prior to disseminating the survey I gained approval from the university's institutional review board (IRB) (see Appendix E). An informed consent was displayed at the beginning of the survey, which addressed the key ethical issues (Groves et al., 2004) (see Appendix A): (a) risks of participation, (b) benefits of participation, (c) participants' rights, (d) remunerations, (e) privacy and confidentiality, and (f) contact information for the primary researcher, major professor, and IRB office.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

This study employed several verification methods to ensure its rigor and trustworthiness. According to Creswell (1998), at least two out of eight of the following strategies should be used to ensure trustworthiness: triangulation, negative case analysis, researcher reflexivity, member checks, prolonged engagement/rapport with participants, peer reviews, rich, thick descriptions and external audits. For this study, triangulation, peer reviews, rich, thick descriptions, and external audits were employed to ensure rigor and trustworthiness. Additionally, Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) recommend using audit trails, which were also employed in this study.

As previously indicated, triangulation, the use of multiple sources of data and multiple methods of data collection to support emergent themes and explain findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), was used for this mixed methods designs. More specifically, triangulation occurred by comparing qualitative and quantitative data from closed-and open-ended survey responses for each research question. These multiple data sources were also compared within and between all participants' responses for further triangulation and analysis.

One colleague performed an independent open coding analysis of all qualitative data and subsequently, a peer review of my interpretations, findings, data coding, and emergent themes

(Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). This procedure allowed the colleague to assess my consistency in analyzing the data to enhance the study's rigor and trustworthiness.

Also, participants' written responses to open-ended survey questions are woven throughout the findings to provide rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon being studied. The participants' verbatim quotes afford readers the opportunity to determine if they have experienced similar circumstances (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) recommend utilizing audit trails for tracking the researcher's processes and procedures used to collect and analyze data. Thus, in addition to my self-reflective statements, I continually documented my thoughts, reasons, and processes in a journal to elucidate the inner workings of this study and to enhance its transparency. A sample of this is located in Appendix F.

Finally, according to Creswell (1998), an external audit is conducted by someone who is not associated with the study to assess the accuracy of its processes and product. Therefore, one individual, not associated with this study, reviewed my processes and products by analyzing the contents of my journal, audit trails (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008), analyses, findings, results, and overall study. In summary, the multitude of methods employed in this study should demonstrate more than adequate rigor and trustworthiness to make inferences about the results.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The current study employed a mixed method sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) in which data collected during phase 1 (Baltimore, 2007) contributed to the development of a survey instrument and research questions utilized in the present study (phase 2). Additionally, this research employed a triangulation mixed methods design; qualitative data from phase 1 and a survey instrument comprised of both quantitative and qualitative questions for phase 2 were used to compensate for each method's respective weaknesses (Creswell & Plano Clark). Data were integrated and analyzed concurrently to arrive at a thorough understanding of family adoption communication processes.

This chapter reports the results for each of the study's four research questions and additional findings. Because using only one method of inquiry is sometimes insufficient for providing a complete explanation of the phenomenon being studied, both quantitative and qualitative data are used to answer these results. The qualitative data will complement the quantitative data by providing thick description that is often absent from quantitative studies (Denzin, 1989). First, each research question is listed. Second, themes and subthemes are categorized for research questions 2-4 and for the Additional Findings section to provide a comprehensive overview of parent-child adoption-related communication processes. Third, a series of tables throughout the qualitative results section summarize each research question, additional findings, respective themes and subthemes that substantiate the conclusions, the survey questions used to formulate the themes and subthemes, and the data analysis procedures which elucidated family adoption communication processes from these adopted college students. Also, inferential and descriptive statistics are concurrently provided throughout this section to

substantiate the findings. In addition, because the comments used throughout these findings are verbatim from participants' written statements, grammatical and spelling errors are included exactly as each participant wrote his or her responses. Finally, consistent with the qualitative and quantitative data reporting methods, I used adjectives, such as "approximately" and "about" to describe many quantitative findings because quantitative data reporting typically employs descriptive statistics but qualitative data reporting does not use numbers. Thus, the use of adjectives with numbers converge two different types of data, while preserving the perspective of each paradigm (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

**Research Question 1:
Do Adult Adoptees Report Engaging in Adoption-related Topic Avoidance with Their
Adoptive Parents?**

To answer research question 1, I used responses to both closed-ended and open-ended survey questions (see Table 6). Participants answered the closed-ended survey questions via a Likert-type 1-6 scale, which assessed adopted college students' topic avoidance, over their lifetime, with their adoptive parents. Cumulative summations for adoption-related topics participants reported avoiding *rarely*, *sometimes*, *frequently*, and *always* with their adoptive parents are reported below in descending order (see Table 7), listing the most- to least-frequently avoided adoption-related topics posed in the survey. For the following data reported within the Results section, *n* is used to indicate the total number of participants who responded to the specified closed-ended question with the greatest frequency and *M* is used to indicate the mean number of all participants' responses to each closed-ended survey question. With their adoptive mothers, participants most frequently avoided discussing (a) their interests in questions they have about their birth family ($n=74$, $M=2.35$), (b) any topic concerning their birth mom ($n=73$, $M=2.45$), (c) searching for any one member of their birth family ($n=73$, $M=2.63$), (d) their interests in meeting

at least 1 member of their birth family ($n=72$, $M=2.61$), and (e) at least 1 question about their adoption ($n=68$, $M=2.28$). Participants reported that they have been least likely to avoid discussing gaps in their medical history that result from being adopted ($n=51$, $M=1.94$) and their inherited traits (e.g. height, eye color, hair color, and so forth) ($n=56$, $M=2.43$).

Table 6. Survey Questions Related to Research Question 1: Do Adult Adoptees Report Engaging in Adoption-related Topic Avoidance With Their Adoptive Parents?

Open-ended Survey Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If you could ask your adoptive mother one question about your adoption, what would that question be? 2. If you could ask your adoptive father one question about your adoption, what would that question be? 3. If applicable, please describe at least one adoption-related issue or question you wanted to discuss with either of your adoptive parents but chose not to do so.
Closed-ended Survey Questions
<p>Please recall how frequently, if ever, you avoided talking about the following topics with your adoptive mother/adoptive father over your <u>entire lifetime</u>. When determining if you ever “avoided” a topic, we want you to include any time you ever:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wanted to discuss the topic, but didn’t • had a question regarding a topic but didn’t ask it • had a thought but didn’t talk about it, etc. <p>With my <u>adoptive mother</u> through my entire lifetime, I have avoided discussing...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Questions I have about my birth family 2. My interests in searching for any one member of my birth family 3. Any topic concerning my birth mom 4. My interests in meeting at least one member of my birth family 5. At least 1 question about my adoption 6. My biological family’s history 7. My interests in contacting the adoption agency or attorney who finalized my adoption 8. Whether or not I have biologically-related brothers or sisters 9. My inherited traits (height, eye color, hair color, personality, etc.) 10. Gaps in my medical history that result from being adopted <p>With my <u>adoptive father</u> through my entire lifetime, I have avoided discussing...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Any topic concerning my birth dad 12. My interests in searching for any one member of my birth family 13. At least 1 question about my adoption 14. Questions I have about my birth family 15. My interests in contacting the adoption agency or attorney who finalized my adoption 16. My interests in meeting at least one member of my birth family 17. My biological family’s history 18. Whether or not I have biologically-related brothers or sisters 19. My inherited traits (height, eye color, hair color, personality, etc.) 20. Gaps in my medical history that result from being adopted

Table 7. Cumulative Summation of Topics that Adopted Adult College Students Have Avoided Discussing With Their Adoptive Parents Over Their Lifetimes.

Mothers									
Topics Avoided	Degrees of Avoidance ¹					Total	Mean	Never	No Adoptive Mom
	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always					
	#/%	#/%	#/%	#/%	#	#	#/%	#/%	#/%
Biological family	20/11	18/10	26/15	10/6	74	2.35	58/33	25/14	20/11
Birth mom	15/9	24/14	20/11	14/8	73	2.45	59 / 34	25/14	8/5
Search for 1 biological family member	18/10	14/8	18/10	23/13	73	2.63	51/29	25/14	25/14
Meet any 1 biological family member	16/9	15/9	22/13	19/11	72	2.61	57/33	26/15	15/8
Any 1 question	23/13	19/11	19/11	7/4	68	2.28	72 / 41	25/14	17/10
Biological family history	21/12	20/11	15/9	10/6	66	2.21	62/35	25/14	21/12
Attorney/agency	18/10	11/6	15/9	21/12	65	2.60	54/31	25/14	25/14
Biological sibling	21/12	10/6	10/6	23/13	64	2.55	59/34	25/14	19/11
Inherited traits	17/10	13/7	11/6	15/9	56	2.43	69/39	25/14	25/14
Biological family medical history	24/14	11/6	11/6	5/3	51	1.94	72/42	25/14	30/17
Total Number	193	155	167	147	662	2.41	613		

¹ 0=never, 1=rarely, 2=sometimes, 3=frequently, 4=always, 5=no adoptive mom, 6=N/A

Fathers									
Topics Avoided	Degrees of Avoidance ¹					Total	Mean	Never	No Adoptive Dad
	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always					
	#/%	#/%	#/%	#/%	#	#	#/%	#/%	#/%
Birth dad	19/11	13/7	16/9	46/26	94	2.95	60/24	3/2	16/9
Search for 1 biological family member	16/9	10/6	18/10	40/23	84	2.90	58/33	3/2	28/16
Any 1 question	22/13	16/9	17/10	29/17	84	2.63	76/43	3/2	10/6
Biological family	20/11	13/7	14/8	36/21	83	2.92	68/38	3/2	19/11
Attorney/agency	17/10	5/3	19/11	41/23	82	2.39	58/33	3/2	30/17
Biological family history	22/13	10/6	17/10	32/18	81	2.73	67/38	3/2	22/13
Meet 1 biological family member	16/9	7/4	20/12	38/22	81	2.99	63/36	3/2	26/15
Biological sibling	16/9	6/3	15/9	42/24	79	3.05	64/37	3/2	27/15
Inherited traits	17/10	13/7	18/10	30/17	78	2.78	70/40	3/2	22/13
Biological medical history	26/15	9/5	12/7	22/13	69	2.43	69/40	3/2	32/19
Total Number	191	102	166	356	815	2.78	653		

¹ 0=never, 1=rarely, 2=sometimes, 3=frequently, 4=always, 5=no adoptive dad, 6=N/A

With their adoptive fathers, participants most frequently avoided discussing (a) any topic concerning their birth dad ($n=94$, $M=2.95$), (b) at least 1 question about their adoption ($n=84$,

$M=2.63$), (c) questions about their birth family ($n=83$, $M=2.92$), (d) their interests in contacting the adoption agency or attorney who finalized their adoption ($n=82$, $M=2.39$), (e) their interests in meeting at least 1 member of their birth family ($n=81$, $M=2.99$), (f) their biological family's history ($n=81$, $M=2.73$), (g) whether or not they have biologically-related siblings ($n=79$, $M=3.05$), and (h) searching for any one member of their birth family ($n=84$, $M=2.90$). Similar to their responses concerning their adoptive mother, participants were least apt to avoid discussing with their adoptive father gaps in their medical history that result from being adopted ($n=69$, $M=2.43$) and their inherited traits (e.g. height, eye color, hair color, personality, etc.) ($n=78$, $M=2.78$). Table 7 summarizes these data.

It is important to note that the number of participants who responded to the adoptive father questions is greater than those who responded to the adoptive mother questions because the sampling included more participants who were adopted by stepfathers ($n=25$) than by stepmothers ($n=3$) (see Table 7). Thus more participants were able to respond only to questions regarding their - adoptive father than were only able to respond to their adoptive mother; hence fewer participants had adoptive mothers due to the much greater instances of being adopted by a stepfather than by a stepmother. The participants reported 662 times that at some frequency they avoided discussing the adoption-related topics posed in the survey with their adoptive mother; they reported 815 times that they *rarely*, *sometimes*, *frequently*, or *always* avoided discussing certain adoption-related topics with their adoptive fathers. On the other hand, participants reported 613 times that they *never* avoided discussing these adoption-related topics with their adoptive mother and reported 653 times that they *never* avoided discussing these topics with their adoptive father. However, another way to understand these quantitative finding is to examine the means for the different topics to see what the average level of avoidance is for each

topic with the lowest possible mean being 1 and the largest being 4, since I computed means only for those who had at some time avoided and did not include those scored as 0 who said they never avoided that topic. The overall mean for fathers of 2.77 for fathers and 2.41 for mothers is consistent with counting the number of times participants simply indicated avoiding a topic at any level; the fathers' mean is closer to the *frequently avoid* and mothers' mean is closer to *sometimes avoid* on the scale. Thus, based on the quantitative data, a little more than one-half of the participants have engaged in topic avoidance with their adoptive parents concerning the adoption-related topics outlined in Table 7, with a higher level of avoidance with their fathers than with their mothers.

In addition, more than 50 participants provided qualitative responses to all three open-ended questions (see Table 6), which substantiated their quantitative responses indicating that they *never* avoided discussing adoption-related topics with their adoptive mothers or fathers. No themes or subthemes were identified for the responses to these three questions however, the following comments exemplify participants' explanations regarding their degree of open parent-child communications and hence the *lack* of topic avoidance with their adoptive parents for those who did not practice any or much topic avoidance. The open-ended question, "If you could ask your adoptive father one question about your adoption, what would that question be?" yielded many comments such as:

I've asked him all the questions I've had. He's been quite open about my adoption.

There's nothing I haven't already asked him.

My dad is very open to me about my adoption. He is a very family-oriented individual and understands that my birth parents are a part of my family. I could ask him anything I would like.

I've asked him all the questions I've had. He's been quite open about my adoption.

Again I have no questions, we've always been open on this subject.

Participants wrote very similar statements in answering the same question relative to their mother.

We discuss it openly - there are no questions that have never been asked.

...Any question I might have had I've had the chance to ask. My mother and I are very close, and I know I can ask her anything. It's pretty obvious that I'm adopted.

I've asked her all the questions I've had. She's been quite open about my adoption.

Responses to another open-ended question give additional insights about these adoptees' open communications with their parents. For instance, following are comments participants made in response to this question, "If applicable, please describe at least one adoption-related issue or question you wanted to discuss with either of your adoptive parents but chose not to do so."

I have a very open relationship with my new family, and I've never felt unable to ask anything of them about my adoption.

I have no unanswered questions.

At least 15 participants' open-ended responses illustrate that adoptees rarely engage in adoption-related topic avoidance with their adoptive parent(s). Based on participants' responses to the closed-ended survey questions, it appears topic avoidance has occurred within at least one-half of these adoptive families. Additional qualitative data indicating that adoptees have not engaged in, or rarely engage in, adoption-related topic avoidance are contained in the results section for research question 2, theme 5. Finally, answers to research questions 2, 3, and 4, and the additional findings will provide a more complete understanding of adoption-related topic avoidance in these adoptive families.

Research question 2:

If adoption-related topic avoidance occurs within adoptive families, what are the major themes of adoption-related topics that are avoided by adoptees with their adoptive parents?

Open- and closed-ended survey responses were used to answer research question 2. To gain a more thorough understanding of the major themes participants avoid with their parents, qualitative data were derived from the following open-ended survey questions: (a) “If you could ask your adoptive mother one question about your adoption, what would that question be?” (b) “If you could ask your adoptive father one question about your adoption, what would that question be?” (c) “If applicable, please describe at least one adoption-related issue or question you wanted to discuss with either of your adoptive parents but chose not to do so.” and (d) “Please specify all other unanswered questions you still have.” (see Table 8). Qualitative responses to these four questions were analyzed using open-coding to arrive at themes and subthemes of adoption-related topics adoptees avoided discussing with their adoptive parents. In addition, the same closed-ended survey questions used to answer research question 1 also were utilized to answer question 2 (see Tables 6 and 8). Finally, qualitative and quantitative data are reported concurrently to substantiate all themes and subthemes and to more fully answer research question 2.

The five themes and 18 subthemes that emerged from the four open-ended questions are listed in Table 8.

Table 8. Survey Questions and Emergent Themes Related to Research Question 2: If Adoption-related Topic Avoidance Occurs Within Adoptive Families, What are the Major Themes of Adoption-related Topics That are Avoided by Adoptees With Their Adoptive Parents?

Open-ended Survey Questions	
<p>1. If you could ask your adoptive mother one question about your adoption, what would that question be?</p> <p>2. If you could ask your adoptive father one question about your adoption, what would that question be?</p> <p>3. If applicable, please describe at least one adoption-related issue or question you wanted to discuss with either of your adoptive parents but chose not to do so.</p> <p>4. Please specify all other unanswered questions you still have.</p>	
Emergent Themes and Subthemes	
Themes	Subthemes
1. Questions about birth family members	What more do you know? Why? Who?
2. Searching/meeting	
3. General adoption-related questions	Why adopt? Why me? What do you know about my birth family? Medical information Miscellaneous
4. General adoption-related curiosities	Birthfather Locate/search General comments and questions Siblings Adoption plan situation Inherited traits Medical information
5. Adoptees do not avoid discussing adoption-related topics with parents	Open communication Have already asked questions No questions
Closed-ended Survey Questions	
<p>Please recall how frequently, if ever, you avoided talking about the following topics with your adoptive mother/adoptive father over your <u>entire lifetime</u>. When determining if you ever “avoided” a topic, we want you to include any time you ever:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> wanted to discuss the topic, but didn’t had a question regarding a topic but didn’t ask it had a thought but didn’t talk about it, etc. 	
<u>Question</u>	<u>Theme #</u>
With my <u>adoptive mother</u> through my entire lifetime, I have avoided discussing...	
1. Questions I have about my birth family	1, 3, 4, 5
2. My interests in searching for any one member of my birth family	2, 4, 5
3. Any topic concerning my birth mom	1, 3, 4, 5
4. My interests in meeting at least one member of my birth family	2, 4, 5
5. At least 1 question about my adoption	3, 4, 5
6. My biological family’s history	1, 3, 4, 5
7. My interests in contacting the adoption agency or attorney who finalized my adoption	3, 4, 5
8. Whether or not I have biologically-related brothers or sisters	1, 3, 4, 5
9. My inherited traits (height, eye color, hair color, personality, etc.)	1, 3, 4, 5
10. Gaps in my medical history that result from being adopted	1, 3, 4, 5
With my <u>adoptive father</u> through my entire lifetime, I have avoided discussing...	
11. Any topic concerning my birth dad	1, 3, 4, 5
12. My interests in searching for any one member of my birth family	2, 4, 5
13. At least 1 question about my adoption	3, 4, 5
14. Questions I have about my birth family	1, 3, 4, 5
15. My interests in contacting the adoption agency or attorney who finalized my adoption	3, 4, 5
16. My interests in meeting at least one member of my birth family	2, 4, 5
17. My biological family’s history	1, 3, 4, 5
18. Whether or not I have biologically-related brothers or sisters	1, 3, 4, 5
19. My inherited traits (height, eye color, hair color, personality, etc.)	1, 3, 4, 5
20. Gaps in my medical history that result from being adopted	1, 3, 4, 5

Because topic avoidance is a motivationally-based action wherein individuals choose not to discuss certain topics with other individuals (Dailey & Palomares, 2004), it was deemed essential to concurrently report the emergent themes derived from participants' open-ended responses with the respective quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the major themes of adoption-related topics adopted college students chose to avoid discussing with their parents.

Theme 1: Questions About Birth Family Members

Theme 1 and its subthemes emerged from participants' responses to the open-ended questions outlined in Table 8. Numerous comments from participants indicated that they would like to ask their adoptive parents questions about their birth families. Based on participants' written comments, the following subthemes were derived (a) what more do you know?, (b) why?, and (c) who?

Subtheme: What more do you know? Participants mentioned a multitude of questions they would like answered by their parents. Diverse comments are presented for this first subtheme to provide a full range of responses concerning additional information adoptees believe their parents may know about their adoption, but haven't shared with them. Two participants want to know if they have siblings:

Do I have brothers or sisters?

Ask or discuss if I have biologically-related brothers or sisters because like (with my) my mother this has never come up in any of our talks me to them and them to me.

Participants also wrote comments that suggest adoptees speculate their parents may possess more facts than they have shared with them, but they have not discussed these topics with their parents. Here are some of their comments:

If she knows anything about my birth family.

Did you actually know my birth parents?

Everything they really knew about my birth mom.

I would ask my adoptive mother/father what her/his impression was of my birth mother.

What was my biological mother like, and am I anything like her?

Did you ever meet or know my birth mother?

Did you ever see photographs of either of my birth parents?

What does my mother look like?

What were my birth parents like and if there is any contact information?

Written statements from two participants revealed that participants assume their parents may have withheld adoption-related information from them:

How much did you truly know about my birth parents and/or their reason for putting me up for adoption?

I feel that there was some opposition about my family adopting me from extended family members. I would ask her why they didn't want her to adopt me.

One female wrote that she has many curiosities, but because of her circumstances, she cannot get answers from her parents:

I really don't have any questions that my adoptive mother hasn't answered. I know the how and why parts. I have a lot of questions about my biological family, but my parents really don't know anything about them either as I was in an orphanage. There are a lot of holes in my early history because that's the nature of a lot of foreign adoptions. Am I disappointed that I'm not going to learn about my past, most definitely.

Participants' comments concerning questions they have about their birth family members are also substantiated by their responses to the closed-ended survey questions outlined in Table 8 and previously discussed in relation to research question 1. The cumulative totals tabulated for topics that adoptees *rarely*, *sometimes*, *frequently*, and *always* avoid discussing with their parents

are displayed in Table 7; these data revealed that participants avoided discussing (a) any topic concerning their birth mom/dad with their adoptive mother/adoptive father ($n=73$, $M=2.45$; $n=94$, $M=2.95$), (b) questions they have about their birth family with their adoptive mother ($n=74$, $M=2.35$) and adoptive father ($n=83$, $M=2.92$); and (c) their biological family's history with their adoptive mother ($n=66$, $M=2.21$) and adoptive father ($n=81$, $M=2.73$), along with all of the other seven items in Table 7 for mothers and fathers.

Subtheme: Why? Adoptees' written responses also elicited this emergent subtheme comprised of diverse but significant content wherein participants want to know more information. The wide range of responses allows readers to understand the types of questions adult adoptees still have about their adoption, but that they have not asked their adoptive parent(s):

Why can't you understand that I want to know more about my adoption and birth family?

Why don't you want to talk about or tell me who my birth parents are?

Why she lied about not knowing who my birthmother was. She's actually already answered that, but I don't believe her answer. :)

Why did you hate my biological father so badly?

In addition to these qualitative comments, the quantitative data (see Table 7) indicate the frequency (*rarely*, *sometimes*, *frequently*, or *always*) that adoptees avoid discussing any one adoption-related question with their adoptive mother ($n=68$, $M=2.28$) and their adoptive father ($n=84$, $M=2.63$) also substantiate this subtheme. However, participants' open-ended comments provide greater detail regarding the types of questions adoptees would like to ask their parents.

Subtheme: Who? Participants are curious about whether or not their adoptive parents know the names of their birth parents. This curiosity is reflected by the following statements:

Was there even a name, whether you saw it or not, for my biological father?

Names?

What was my birth mother's name?

What was my mom's name?

In addition, the same closed-ended survey questions used to answer research question 1 (see Tables 6 and 8) indicate the frequency (*rarely, sometimes, frequently, always*) that adoptees avoid discussing general questions they have about their birth mother ($n=73$, $M=2.45$), birth father ($n=94$, $M=2.95$), and the combined total for birth family members ($n=158$), with their adoptive parents (see Table 9). Because there may be slight differences between topics adoptees *never* and *rarely* avoided discussing with their adoptive parents, those cumulative summaries are computed separately in Table 9 to exhibit the frequencies of topics *never* or *rarely* avoided by these adult college students.

For instance, adoptees ($n=41$) *always* or *frequently* avoid discussing meeting any one member of their birth family with their adoptive mother, whereas adoptees ($n=96$) *rarely* or *never* avoid discussing biologically-related family members' medical histories with their adoptive mothers.

Results from this study are congruent with previous research indicating that many adoptees think about their birth families and want to talk about them, even if adoptees fail to bring up the topic with their parents (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1993; Eldridge, 1999; Melina, 1998). Based on these subthemes and comments, it appears adult adoptees speculate that their parents may be concealing facts about their adoption and that at least half of the parents and participants are not discussing these topics. Thus, to thwart topic avoidance within adoptive families, it appears imperative that parents take the initiative to discuss these issues across the family's lifespan (a) what more do you know?, (b) why?, and (c) who?

Table 9. Frequencies of Topic Avoidance by Participants with Mothers and with Fathers.

Mothers							
Degrees of Avoidance ¹							
Topics Avoided	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always		
	#/%	#/%	Total#	#/%	#/%	#/%	Total #
Any 1 question	72/ 41	23/13	95	19/11	19/11	7/4	45
Birth mom	59/ 34	15/9	74	24/14	20/11	14/8	58
Birth dad							
Biological family history	62/35	21/12	83	20/11	15/9	10/6	45
Biological medical history	72/42	24/14	96	11/6	11/6	5/3	27
Biological family	58/33	20/11	78	18/10	26/15	10/6	54
Inherited traits	69/39	17/10	86	13/7	11/6	15/9	39
Meet 1 biological family member	57/33	16/9	73	15/9	22/13	19/11	56
Search 1 biological member	51/29	18/10	69	14/8	18/10	23/13	55
Attorney/agency	54/31	18/10	72	11/6	15/9	21/12	47
Biological siblings	59/34	21/12	80	10/6	10/6	23/13	43
TOTAL NUMBER	613	193	806	155	167	147	469

¹ 0=*never*, 1=*rarely*, 2=*sometimes*, 3=*frequently*, 4=*always* (not included in the Table are 5=*no adoptive mom* and 6=*N/A*)

Fathers							
Degrees of Avoidance ¹							
Topics Avoided	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always		
	#/%	#/%	Total #	#/%	#/%	#/%	Total #
Any 1 question	76/43	22/13	98	16/9	17/10	29/17	62
Birth mom							
Birth dad	60/24	19/11	79	13/7	16/9	46/26	75
Biological family history	67/38	22/13	89	10/6	17/10	32/18	59
Biological medical history	69/40	26/15	95	9/5	12/7	22/13	43
Biological family	68/38	20/11	88	13/7	14/8	36/21	63
Inherited traits	70/40	17/10	87	13/7	18/10	30/17	61
Meet 1 biological family member	63/36	16/9	79	7/4	20/12	38/22	65
Search 1 biological member	58/33	16/9	74	10/6	18/10	40/23	68
Attorney/agency	58/33	17/10	75	5/3	19/11	41/23	65
Biological siblings	64/37	16/9	80	6/3	15/9	42/24	63
TOTAL NUMBER	653	191	844	102	166	356	624

¹ 0=*never*, 1=*rarely*, 2=*sometimes*, 3=*frequently*, 4=*always* (not included in the Table are 5=*no adoptive dad* and 6=*N/A*)

Theme 2: Searching/Meeting a Birth Family Member

More than 10 participants indicated that they would like to ask their adoptive mother at least one question about searching for any member of their birth family. Following are some of

the participants' responses to the following open-ended survey question, "If you could ask your adoptive mother one question about your adoption, what would that question be?"

How would you feel if I wanted to meet my biological mother?

If she would be hurt if I went to find my birth family.

When can I go back and find my birth family?

Is it ok if I go and find my biological mother?

What would she think about me finding my birthparents?

How could I maybe get in contact with my birth parents if they are still alive even?

Will you be comfortable with me having a relationship with my biological mother?

One participant explained a desire to contact her birth mother, but is reluctant to discuss this with her adoptive mother, based on her mother's past reactions:

My mother is very jealous of my birth mother because of the one experience that I had with her: she gave birth to me. I naturally have questions concerning where I've come from but my mother gets quite upset when I bring up these questions. If I could ask I would ask her how she would feel if I looked for my birth parents, which is something I plan to do.

Three individuals explained that they have already searched for at least one member of their birth family. Here are their comments:

For me, I believe that my adoptive mother shared all knowledge she had of the adoption and my adoptive parents. She actually did not know very much, but she gave me a box of letters and gifts and things that my birthparents had sent me over the years. However, I was apprehensive about telling my adoptive parents that I had initiated a search and found my birthparents. I felt that I would have somehow disappointed her or saddened her in some way. After talking about it with her, however, she was fine with it and very supportive.

I am in contact with my birth mother, so I do not feel it is necessarily up to my adoptive mother to answer questions regarding my adoption. I do not want to cause my adoptive parents to worry about me, so I choose to find things out through my birth mother if I ever question anything.

My adoptive mother and I are now on great terms with the situation and she was willing to speak with me on anything I wanted to know after finding out I talked with my birth mother.

Two participants shared how they have already asked, or plan to ask, their adoptive mother questions about their adoption:

Any questions I had, I asked. Why would you not ask? I realize most feel that by asking you are ungrateful and unloving but to keep questions while investigating yourself would be more unloving. If they don't have an answer at least they'll know you're searching.

Never came to mind on having biologically related brothers or sisters so maybe ask my adoptive mother that. Besides that she has told me everything she knows.

Also, three other participants indicated search-related questions they would like to ask their adoptive fathers:

Since I was essentially abandoned, is it even possible for me to track down my biological mother?

If he would be willing to meet my birth mother.

Would he think it's ok to find them while him and my mom are still alive?

Similarly, the following are comments participants said they would like to ask both their adoptive mother and adoptive father:

When can I go back and find my birth family?

How would you feel I went out and tried to contact my birthfather?

Would you like to meet my birth parent(s) if the option was available?

Finally, more than 11 participants made search/meet remarks to this survey question, "If applicable, please describe at least one adoption-related issue or question you wanted to discuss with either of your adoptive parents but chose not to do so." Three adoptees explained that they want to search for at least one member of their birth family. Here are their comments:

I don't know how to tell them that I want to find my biological mother. I don't want to crush my adoptive mom.

I would really like to find my sisters, but I just don't think my father would be appreciative of me adding a whole new family.

Wanting to find my adoptive parents to obtain more information.

One female described her plan to search for her birth parents this summer:

I haven't discussed with them recently that I plan to find my birth parents this summer. If I tell my dad, he would be fine with it and wish me the best of luck. However, my mother wouldn't take it well and I'm afraid that she'll get angry with him for helping me with it.

Two participants said they have tried locating birth family members, but they have not discussed their search with at least one of their adoptive parents:

I wrote a letter last year to my birth mom that I never told my adoptive parents. I will someday if they ask though.

Now that I am older I have tried to seek out my birth mother. I have looked into the laws concerning closed adoptions, even tried finding my birth mother on *Facebook* based on the high school information I have about her.

A male participant explained how he did not discuss his search for his birthmother with his adoptive parents:

When I decided to initiate a search for my birthparents, I felt the desire to keep it from my adoptive parents. I know that they would understand, but I did not want anything to change between us. My parents had loved me my entire life and I did not want anything to come between that love. After eventually discussing it with them, I realized that nothing can come between our love.

Two females shared that they do not discuss searching for their birth parents with their adoptive parents:

I do not discuss searching for my birthparents with my adoptive parents.

Mainly finding my birth parents. I could never bring that up with my adoptive parents.

Finally, this female explained how her adoptive mother is still hurt that she has a relationship with her birth mother:

It still hurts my mom that I have a relationship with my birth mom. I wish I could talk about it with her, but it upsets her so I don't. I also try to avoid telling them when I go visit her.

In addition to the open-ended comments, participants' responses to the closed-ended survey questions (see Tables 3 and 8) indicate that adoptees avoid discussing searching for any one biologically-related family member with their adoptive mother ($n=73$, $M=2.63$) and adoptive father ($n=84$, $M=2.90$). Adoptees also avoid discussing meeting any one biologically-related family member with their adoptive mother ($n=72$, $M=2.61$) and adoptive father ($n=81$, $M=2.99$).

These findings are consistent with prior research indicating that some adoptees are interested in searching for their birth family members to gain facts concerning their genetic heritage and medical information. Prior research also demonstrates that some adoptive parents do not discuss these issues with their adopted children (Campbell, Silverman, & Patti, 1991; Simpson, Timm, & McKubbin, 1981). In summary, based on these adult participants' written statements, it appears that additional parenting education concerning adoption-related conversations might benefit adopted children and their adoptive parents. Despite literature, research, and agreement among adoption professionals about the importance of family adoption communication processes, opportunities to enhance this crucial, ongoing, developmental process needs further attention to promote the well-being of all adoptive family members and to thwart topic avoidance. In fact, it is fairly well agreed upon that communication among all types of family structures needs further attention (Vangelisti, 2004).

Theme 3: General Adoption-related Questions

Another prevalent theme of topics adoptees would like to ask their parents is comprised of general questions related to their adoption. Responses to the first three open-ended survey questions outlined in Tables 8 yielded these subthemes (a) why adoption?, (b) why adopt me?,

(c) medical information, and (d) diverse, general miscellaneous questions. Quantitative data were used to substantiate the theme and its subthemes.

Subtheme: Why adoption? The most prevalent subtheme that emerged from the first three open-ended responses regarding questions adoptees would like to ask their parents revealed that adoptees do not know why their parents chose to adopt a child; the majority of participants want to know why their parents could not or did not have biologically-related children. Other participants are curious about why their parents chose adoption instead of other options to add to a family, which is demonstrated by this frequently written comment, “What made you choose adoption over other options?” At least two participants want to know the reasons their parents chose to adopt a child, which is illustrated by this common sentiment in response to the question, “What was the reason that you wanted to adopt a child?” Additional, diverse questions were posed by many participants. The following quotes sum up all written statements revealing participants’ questions about why their parents chose adoption as an option to build their family:

What did you think you were gaining when you decided to adopt me?

I would ask him if he fully agreed with the adoption.

Why did you want to adopt me so badly in the situation that you were in?

Why did you adopt a child when you couldn't be a good mother?

This particular theme was not addressed by a closed-ended survey question; thus, future utilization of the Adoptees’ Topic Avoidance Questionnaire (ATAQ) (Baltimore, 2009), the survey instrument designed for this research, may warrant adding a question concerning why adoptive parents chose to adopt a child.

Interestingly, Melina (1998) recommends that adoptive parents discuss all of the aforementioned topics with their adopted children. However, it appears these adult adoptees

either did not discuss, or do not remember discussing, these topics with their parents. Thus, it may be helpful for parents to understand the types of questions their children want answered, such as why their parents chose to adopt a child. Clearly, the participants' comments substantiate the importance of having conversations regarding this topic.

Subtheme: Why me? Another commonly cited question adoptees would like answered is, "Why did my parents choose me?" The two most commonly written statements are presented to reflect the majority of participants' comments:

Why did you decide to adopt me specifically and not other adoptees?

Why did you pick me?

Also, one male adoptee said he asked his mother why she chose him; here is his written comment, "I did. I asked her, "why me?" However, he did not share his mother's answer, but his statement reveals that adoptees want answers to this question.

This survey instrument did not contain a closed-ended question that addressed potential topic avoidance concerning why adoptive parents specifically chose to adopt the participant. Thus, future utilization of this instrument should add a closed-ended question inquiring about whether or not this topic is avoided by adoptees and their parents.

Overall, these participants' curiosities about why their parents chose adoption and why their parents specifically chose them is corroborated by advice offered by Melina (1998)—parents should tell their children why they chose adoption. However, it appears that some adoptive parents and adopted children may not discuss this important issue.

Subtheme: Medical information. In response to the questions outlined in Table 8, five participants said they want answers to their medical-related questions, which is also a subtheme

described more fully in a subsequent portion of this paper. Following are statements illustrating this notion:

I would simply ask about my medical history.

Probably regarding my birth parents' medical history.

Any medical issues I should know about?

Family health history.

My health history.

Also, data from the closed-ended questions (see Table 7) revealed that participants avoid (either *rarely*, *sometimes*, *frequently*, or *always*) discussing medical information with their adoptive mother ($n=51$, $M=1.94$) and their adoptive father ($n=69$, $M=2.43$).

Adoption professionals generally agree that parents should be honest with their children and should give their children known adoption-related information concerning their child's birth family's medical, genetic, and overall history. However, experts caution against divulging too much information to young children; parents must assess their child's cognitive abilities and chronological age to determine what type of information is appropriate at various stages in the child's development (Brodzinsky et al., 1984; Eldridge, 1999; Melina, 1998). Based on comments from these adopted adult college students, it appears that many of them have not discussed a multitude of topics with their adoptive parents, despite their curiosities. Participants in this study have numerous unanswered questions concerning their adoption—these are outlined in the Additional Findings section of this paper.

Subtheme: Miscellaneous. Another subtheme that emerged regarding questions adoptees would like to ask their adoptive mother or father is categorized into a miscellaneous

adoption-related category, due to participants' diverse, but important responses. Three participants are curious about how their parents feel about adoption:

How do you feel about having to adopt children?

How did you feel on the day you brought me home?

If bearing children were not an obstacle, would you still consider adoption?

Three participants want to know about the adoption process, costs, and why their parents chose a certain country from which to adopt:

Why exactly they chose Romania?

What was the process like?

How much did it cost?

These remaining comments reveal the variations in participants' questions:

Why didn't you and mom learn more about how to be adoptive parents who supported my journey of development?

My dad made sure I always knew he was very glad he adopted me. I would have liked to have known why he felt so strongly about reassuring me.

Additional significant findings emerged when 79 participants answered this open-ended question, "Please specify all other unanswered questions you still have." Based on the multitude of responses to this question and the similarities in responses throughout the survey, I deemed it imperative to report the following theme and seven subthemes:

Theme 4: General Adoption-related Curiosities

Based on the breadth and frequency of participants' responses to the preceding open-ended survey question, this theme was constructed to serve as an overall synopsis of participants' curiosities. It should be noted that participants' written comments did not explicitly indicate that participants avoided discussing these topics with their parents. On the other hand, the

quantitative data demonstrate that some participants have avoided discussing the subsequent topics with their parents. Hence, the following subthemes of curiosities were formulated and many are substantiated with quantitative data (a) birth father, (b) locate/search, (c) general comments and questions, (d) siblings, (e) adoption plan situations, (f) inherited traits, and (g) medical information.

A majority of the participants indicated that they had at least one unanswered question concerning their adoption. This participant's statement summarizes most of the participants' comments indicating that adoptees are curious about many facets of their adoption:

I wouldn't consider them as questions rather desires. I would desire to find my family just to determine where I came from...although in the long run, nothing would really change. Simply curiosity.

Subtheme: Birth father. Fourteen participants said they desire additional information concerning their birth father. For instance, 3 participants indicated that they want to know the location of their biological father.

I just don't know where my biological father is.

Where my biological dad is? What is his name?

Questions regarding my birth father's location/situation.

Similarly, 2 adoptees are interested in knowing the identity of their birthfather.

I desperately want to know whom my birth father is, but my mother doesn't even know other than his first name and general living location back when they were in high school.

Who is my father and why was he never in the picture? Do I look like him? Does he know about me?

Two participants mentioned they have not yet met their birth father:

I still need to get in contact with family on my father's side.

I have met my birth mother and her family, but never met my birth father or his. I would have many questions for him concerning the events surrounding the adoption.

One female said she would not mind meeting her birth father's son from another relationship.

My birth father had a son also with another woman. I wouldn't mind meeting him someday.

Similarly, this participant explained that she thinks about her birth father's family members, but does not necessarily wish to meet her birth father. Here is her explanation:

Because of knowing about my birth father's history and lifestyle I have never wanted to be in contact with him but often wonder about my grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. through his family.

Likewise, two individuals reported that they would like to know more about their birth father's relationship with their birth mother.

I want to know why my birth father didn't stay with my birth mother.

Why did my biological father leave my mother? I know he was young and did not think he could handle it, but that is not my fault. Does he ever think about the decision he made, does he regret it?

One male has questions about his birth father and half brothers:

Whether or not my birth father misses me, and if my half brothers remember me.

One participant said that she avoids discussing her birthfather, because she does not want to hurt her adoptive father's feelings and does not want to broach the topic with either one of her parents:

Everything about my birth father, but I've avoided doing so because I don't want to hurt my adopted father's feelings.

Finally, this young woman explains that her biological father passed away so she has a lot of unanswered questions.

Many of my questions involve information about my biological father's family. He died after I was able to meet him, and there were many things I haven't been able to understand since I don't have him for information.

Most of these comments do not demonstrate that participants have avoided discussing their birth father with one of their parents; rather, participants relay curiosities about their birth fathers. Furthermore, participants' statements illustrate much more detail about the types of issues they would like answered and provide insights into types of topics parents should be discussing with their adopted children. Additionally, the cumulative summations of quantitative data demonstrate that participants ($n=94$, $M=2.90$) do indeed avoid discussing their birth father with their adoptive father. Future utilization of this instrument would benefit from including the same question regarding participants' desires to ask questions of their biologically-related mother, since many adoptees live with their biologically-related mother and adoptive father.

Subtheme: Locate/search. In addition, at least six participants said they may be interested in locating birth family members or their own adoption records.

Would like the records unsealed but they are not in the county I was born in.

I have wondered who my biological family is and if I have any biological siblings. I wonder what it would be like to meet them, and if it's a good idea.

How do I go about contacting my biological family?

All of the above (birth mother, birth family history, medical history, family members, characteristics, inherited traits, searching) also about grandparents and other relatives. It'd be cool to just know more about them, and about my family's medical history.

Also, Table 7 illustrates the quantitative data demonstrating that adoptees avoid discussing (a) searching for any one member of their biologically-related family with their adoptive mother ($n=73$, $M=2.63$) and adoptive father ($n=84$, $M=2.90$), and (b) meeting any one member of their biologically-related family with their adoptive mother ($n=72$, $M=2.61$) and their adoptive father ($n=81$, $M=2.99$).

Searching and thinking about searching for birth family members is a normal process for many adoptees (Brodzinsky et al., 1993). Thus, based on these data, it may be prudent for

adoptive parents to take the initiative to discuss adoptees' interest in searching or locating birth family members at least a few times across their children's lifespan.

Subtheme: General comments/questions. A multitude of participants shared general questions and comments they have concerning their adoption. The following statements reveal three participants' general curiosities:

What is my birth mother like? Where is my birth dad? What is my half brother like? Why am I here? What were the conditions of my conception (am I an accident)?

Who are my biological parents? Do they have an interest in meeting me? Do I have biological siblings? My medical history...

Who were my parents? Why I was placed for adoption? Do I have any medical issues in my family? What do they look like? Do I have brothers and sisters? Do they want to meet me?

Likewise, this participant said she doesn't have answers to any of her questions:

I don't have anything answered. All I have answered are the first names of my biological parents.

The following quotes from five participants support adoptees' general, but yet very different adoption-related questions and comments:

It is not a missing hole in my life, but I would really like to meet my biological mother. We think she has had kids since me, at least a daughter, so I would like to meet my biological sister. Also, does she even want to meet me?

I received a mysterious letter in the mail when I was in 6th grade with a picture of a little girl saying she is my biological sister. This scared me and in a way I wanted nothing to do with it because I have never known who my father is and I don't want to.

My sister is also adopted, and she unlike me was more interested in her biological parents. She once told me that she looked into who her mother was and that the descriptions were limited on the amount of money you pay. I think that is not right and unethical.

Just if they are doing well now.

Even if they are still living or not. However, that is my choice not to know. I have never seen somebody (at least that I am aware of) that I am biologically related to and I wonder what that would feel like.

Also, five participants wonder if any members of their birth families are still living. The following statement substantiates their thoughts.

If my biological parents are still alive...Do you still think about me? If I had other siblings, were they put up for adoption? What is your life like now? How old were you when you had me? Were your own parents/family mad for putting me up for adoption?

Furthermore, a few participants mentioned that they want to know their birth family members' identities. The following two comments illustrate this curiosity:

Who they were, any other family and health concerns.

I want to know who my birth parents are, how they are doing, what they do, and if I have any brothers or sisters.

Although participants' open-ended survey responses do not demonstrate topic avoidance, the quantitative data reveal that participants avoid discussing at least one question about their adoption with their adoptive mother ($n=68$, $M=2.28$) and their adoptive father ($n=84$, $M=2.63$). Similarly, participants avoid discussing many other adoption-related issues with their adoptive parents, which are substantiated by their responses mentioned above.

Subtheme: Siblings. In addition, at least four participants listed questions regarding potential siblings that they do not know about. The following two statements elucidate adoptees' thoughts:

Since I was adopted when I was two years old I know nothing about if I have other siblings or anything, and the adoption agency my parents worked with have no records stating if I do or not, so if there was one thing I would like to know is if I have other siblings and possibly if they were adopted and brought to the US as well.

Just simply do not know if I have other siblings and/or where my biological parents are now.

Interestingly, this female participant wants to know many facts, including whether or not her twin brother is really her twin brother:

Since mine was a foreign adoption I have a plethora of questions about every aspect of my adoption - who are my birth parents, what situation led to me being put of for adoption, are there items in my medical history I need to know about, do I have any living blood relatives - besides my twin brother - is my twin brother really my twin?

To complement these qualitative data, participants' responses to the closed-ended survey questions demonstrate adoptees' topic avoidance with their adoptive mother ($n=64$, $M=2.55$) and adoptive father ($n=79$, $M=3.05$) regarding whether or not they have biologically-related siblings (see Table 7). Thus, it may be beneficial for birth parents to provide updated sibling information to adoptive parents, an intermediary, or to a mutual consent registry to reduce adoptees' curiosities.

Subtheme: Adoption plan situation. Approximately six adoptees expressed their curiosities about the situations into which they were born, demonstrated by these quotes:

I am curious about everything! I want to know the situation I was born into, along with my medical history.

I want to know more about the relationship between my birth mother and birth father as they were not married and in a complicated relationship.

Just specifics about my adoption as to why my mother's family had the say as to whether or not I was going to be adopted since my birthfather's family told me how much they wanted to keep me.

I would like to know if my birth mother was okay after putting my brother and I up for adoption since I know that my birth father died, which could have left her quite lonely.

Overall, since my adoption was and is closed, there is very little information regarding my biological family history. I do have records that are in Korean that I have yet to be translated. It has not been a pressing issue for me to get this done, however.

A significant curiosity for adoptees is why an adoption plan was made for them, but it appears to be a question for which no answer typically exists. Thus, international, standardized

adoption forms should request that birth parents provide this information at the time of the adoption so it can be shared with adoptive parents and adoptees. This information has also been deemed important for adoptees' identity development (Lifton, 1994).

Subtheme: Inherited traits. In related comments, a few participants said they want to know about their inherited characteristics. These two comments sum up the participants' interests:

I would ask my mother how many messed up people are on her side of the family.

Traits (physical and behavioral) that I inherited.

Closed-ended survey responses reveal that participants have avoided discussing their inherited traits with their adoptive mother ($n=56$, $M=2.43$) and their adoptive father ($n=78$, $M=2.78$), but participants' open-ended responses reveal that adoptees would like this information (see Table 7). Thus, adoption agencies should use standardized forms that require birth parents to provide genetic and inheritable trait information, at the time the adoption is complete so adoptees have this information.

Subtheme: Medical information. Similarly, numerous participants wrote statements indicating that they want to know their birth family members' genetic health histories. Three participants indicated that medical information from birth family members is somewhat desirable, but they do not deem it extremely important.

Due to the fact that my birth mother was a minor at the time of my birth her records have been sealed. I would like to know some of my medical history in some situations, however it is not extremely important.

My only questions have to do with medical history and other relatives. Those are my questions, but I am not actively looking for answers.

When filling out my medical background, I never know what to put because my genes are different than my parents, so I just leave it blank. No big deal.

One participant explained that she does not wish to meet her birth family members, but she would like to obtain medical information concerning their health histories:

I have no knowledge of my medical history; while I have no desire to meet my birth parents it would be useful to know my medical history.

On the other hand, two female participants (ages 21-and 44-years old) explained that they have already met some of their biologically-related family members, but they have not yet inquired about their genetic medical histories:

I have met my bio mom and siblings, but not my bio dad. I still have medical questions for him and I would like more information from my bio mom about her history.

I've met my birth mother and siblings, but medical history isn't something I've brought up in discussion, but I do think it needs to be addressed just for future reference. I would be interested in meeting related aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc...

Also, one male explained that he has been in contact with his birth parents, but he would still like more detailed medical information. Here is his response:

For the last six months I have been in contact with my birthparents. I posted my information on a blog and my birthfather found the blog that very week! :) I have been slowly working up to some deeper questions in my contact with both birthparents, but I still would like to eventually know the details of why I was placed for adoption (i.e., why they did not stay together, etc.). Although I have lots of genetic information about my birth relatives, I would like more detailed medical records, for my own personal health file. I still know very little about my birth-grandparents and aunts and uncles. I would like to know more about them and who they are.

The majority of participants wrote general comments indicating their desire to obtain medical information from their biologically-related family members. Following are eight comments illustrating these thoughts:

Since my adoption was a fully closed adoption I do not know why I was placed for adoption. I do not know any of my medical history or genetic background. I also do not know if I have any other biologically-related brothers or sisters somewhere.

I have no idea about my medical history.

There is no medical history given in my adoption file.

I would like a full print out of my parents' medical history.

Just the medical history of that half of my genetic make-up.

I do not have a full and complete family medical history of my birth family. My birthmother has no contact with my birthfather and I have no information regarding who he is.

Just what I need to look out for medically speaking.

No medical records were found for me except for a birth certificate. I have no clue about medical history, none were know when I was adopted. I haven't been in contact with a few biological siblings who I remained in contact with for yrs after the adoption.

In addition to having biologically-related family members' health histories, the following statement from a 27-year old who was adopted by a stepparent reveals the overall importance of obtaining one's own medical records:

Old medical records would be very hard to find as we did a lot of moving around the first 5 years of my life, before the divorce. I would like to know how to get a complete medical record for my entire life.

Also, 3 participants cited their own current health concerns, which have elicited their interests in obtaining birth family medical information. One participant explained her desire for knowing her family's genetic medical information after receiving a skin cancer diagnosis:

I wish they would be more informing about my birth parents. Considering I have skin cancer, it would have been nice to know my biological parent's health information.

The following comment is from a participant who obtained some genetic health information, only after undergoing heart surgery. She explains that health information does not reveal personal information, thus she contends medical histories of biologically-related family members should be made available to adoptees:

I have some of my medical history only after finding the need to have heart surgery and then it was only related to my specific problem. Medical history does not reveal personal information and could be vital to the adopted child.

Furthermore, two adoptees indicated they currently have health concerns; thus, they would like further medical information from their biologically-related family members:

I have a lot of small problems medically and I want to know about what I need to watch out for in later years. I would really like to meet my birth mother someday and find out who my birth father is. Finding out if my birth father has any other kids.

Curious about some of allergies/illnesses, etc. I think knowing your family medical history is very useful.

These last two statements are general comments from participants who want to meet their biologically-related family members and would like to obtain their medical information:

I would like to know my medical history, since I don't know anything about it. In addition, I am interesting in contacting and possibly meeting any member of my birth family.

I am not sure of any medical history passed on from my birth family. I am not sure which agency I was adopted through, and I am very interested in finding my birth family. I just don't know how to bring it up with my parents because I don't know how they would feel about it.

Despite the low number of participants who said they have avoided discussing their gaps in their genetic medical histories with their adoptive mother ($n=51$, $M=1.94$) and their adoptive father ($n=69$, $M=2.43$), it appears to be a significant curiosity especially considering participants' qualitative responses (see Table 7). Although literature suggests that genetic health information is important for adoptees to know, many barriers exist for adoptees in obtaining this information, such as adoptees not feeling comfortable discussing it with their parents, sealed adoption records, and little or no information contained within adoption documents passed on to adoptive families (Baltimore, 2007; Eldridge, 1999). Recommended policy implications concerning adoptees' genetic health histories are contained in Chapter 5 of this paper.

An extensive analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data reveal many themes of adoption-related topics that are avoided by adoptees with their parents, which include (a) their

birth mother/birth father, (b) meeting any one member of their biologically-related family, and (c) searching for any one member of their biologically-related family. On the other hand, the quantitative data indicate that adoptees are least apt to avoid discussing these topics with their adoptive parents (a) inherited traits as a result of being adopted, (b) biologically-related family history, and (c) biological medical history. One explanation for the lack of topic avoidance concerning the former three topics may be related to adoptees' thoughts that their parents do not possess, or have access to, this information; thus they do not consciously avoid discussing the topics with their parents. This explanation is further explored in research question 3, concerning adoptees' perceptions of barriers to obtaining adoption-related information. Last, a few gender differences emerged between the types of questions and topics that adoptees avoid discussing with their mothers and fathers; these data are contained in a subsequent section of this paper, under research question 4.

Additionally, the qualitative comments provide more themes of potential topics adoptees avoid discussing with their parents, such as (a) why adopt?, (b) why me?, and (c) their own adoption plan situation. Furthermore, based on the descriptive statistics, participants ($N=175$) reported 662 times that with their adoptive mother, they *rarely*, *sometimes*, *frequently*, or *always* avoid discussing the adoption-related topics posed in the survey. Similarly, participants reported 815 times that they *rarely*, *sometimes*, *frequently*, or *always* avoid discussing the same adoption-related topics with their adoptive fathers (see Table 7). Hence, based on data derived from Table 7, this study provides evidence that approximately 74 adopted college students have engaged in adoption-related topic avoidance with their adoptive parents when they indicated that they avoided at least one topic, at least one time, with their parent(s).

Conversely, participants ($N=175$) reported 613 times that they *never* avoid discussing the same adoption-related topics with their adoptive mother and reported 653 times that they *never* avoid discussing these adoption-related topics with their adoptive father. Thus, based on the quantitative data, approximately 40% of these participants do not avoid discussing the aforementioned adoption-related with their parents (see Table 7). Therefore, the current study also adds to the literature by demonstrating that approximately 51 adopted college students reported that they have never avoided adoption-related topics with their adoptive parent(s), which is illustrated by the next theme and its subthemes.

Theme 5: Adoptees Do Not Avoid Discussing Adoption-related Topics With Their Parents

Finally, consistent with the previously cited quantitative data, this last theme indicates that participants do not avoid adoption-related topics with their parents. In fact, more than 50 open-ended responses were written illustrating that adoptees do not engage in topic avoidance with their parents. For example, nine participants said they do not have any additional unanswered questions they have avoided discussing with their parents. Similarly, one participant wrote the following statement:

I almost rarely even remember that I am adopted, so I do not have any questions left lingering in my mind. Since this survey was brought up, it got my thinking again, but these questions really have no importance to my happiness or outlook on life as I am a healthy person, who feels successful.

The major subthemes of reasons participants listed for not engaging in topic avoidance with their adoptive parents include that participants (a) engage in open communications, (b) have already asked all questions, and (c) do not have any questions. For instance, participants said 613 times that they *never* avoided discussing the list of adoption-related topics with their mother and reported 653 times that they never avoided discussing the list of topics with their father (see Table 7). These findings were also substantiated by more than 50 written responses, wherein

participants explained that they have *never* avoided discussing adoption-related topics with their adoptive parent(s).

Subtheme: Open communication. More than 25 participants wrote comments indicating that they do not avoid adoption-related conversations with their parents. The following quotes illustrate this prevalent subtheme:

I really do not have any questions. My current family has been very good in discussing and answering questions I have pertaining to everything they know about my adoption, my birth parents, and why I was given up for adoption. I would simply ask my parents about themselves and who they are.

We are very open and talk about everything. I have no questions as of right now.

I don't have any questions. My family and I are very open about my adoption. Also, my birth mother very recently has tried to be in contact with me and my adoptive mother has been very understanding.

My mother was very open about my adoption so there isn't anything that she knows about my adoption that I do not know.

My parents (adoptive) have always been extremely open with me about adoption and have always answered any questions I have to the best of their knowledge. Because of this I have no questions that I've always wondered about.

My dad is very open to me about my adoption. He is a very family-oriented individual and understands that my birth parents are a part of my family. I could ask him anything I would like.

I think I have asked them every possible question I could have. They are extremely open about everything, and don't treat it like something that should be hidden. They know I love them and wouldn't trade them for the world, so they are very open with talk....

...My parents are extremely open and so am I. If I had a question they were always truthful and would let me know anything I wanted to know about my adoption.

Subtheme: Have already asked questions. Open communication between participants and their parent(s) is also associated with the second most commonly cited reason participants provided for not engaging in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents—

participants have already asked all of the questions they want answered. Fifteen participants wrote statements demonstrating their comfort in asking their parent(s) questions:

There's nothing I haven't already asked her.

I ask him anything I want already.

I have asked all the questions that I have wanted to.

I've asked her all the questions I've had. She's been quite open about my adoption.

I always ask whenever I think of something once I figure out how I want to ask it.

I've already ask them all.

I have already asked her any questions that seemed relevant to me.

I have asked all the questions that I have wanted to

We discuss it openly - there are no questions that have not been asked.

This finding replicates a study (Lanz et al., 1999) of 450 adolescents between the ages of 11- and 17-years of age from separated or divorced families ($n=140$), intact, non-adoptive families ($n=160$), and transnational adoptive families ($n=150$). Adopted adolescents reported more positive communication with their parents when compared to adolescents who were biologically-related to their parents. Thus, this present study contributes to existing literature by demonstrating that open parent-child communication exists in many of these adoptive families and these participants have very similar family adoption communication processes.

Subtheme: No existing questions. In contrast to participants citing open communication and asking their parent(s) all of their adoption-related questions, more than 10 participants explained that they do not talk about adoption-related issues with their parent(s) at or they do not have any interest in knowing more about their adoption. The following quotes illustrate this subtheme:

I really never talked to my dad much about adoption-although if I did-he would have listened and been supportive.

...I have no interest in knowing, no questions.

No questions, same as with my mother, only thanks for everything he's done for me.

I do not have any questions because I consider them my parents. My biological parents are not my parents and I have no want or reason to see them. They are just people out there in the world to me that I don't know...

In sum, the qualitative data that support this theme and its subthemes offer more information than the quantitative data alone concerning why adoptees do not engage in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parent(s). For instance, the quantitative data demonstrated that many participants have never engaged in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents. However, the quantitative data failed to elucidate how or why some participants do not engage in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents, such as (a) they already engage in open communication, (b) they have already asked all of the questions they want answered, and (c) they do not have any existing questions they want answered. Thus, participants' responses should be used to provide insights into the development of parenting education curricula about communicating with children who are reared by someone other than a birth parent, because these data provide evidence that open communication can and does occur within this family type.

Research Question 3:

If adoption-related topic avoidance occurs within adoptive families, what are the major themes of reasons that adoption-related topics are avoided by adoptees with their adoptive parents?

Since these data demonstrate that adoption-related topic avoidance often occurs within adoptive families and illustrate the major themes of topics that are avoided, it is also important to determine the reasons topic avoidance occurs within adoptive families. In order to identify adoptees' reasons for adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents, participants' responses

to the following open-ended questions were analyzed (a). “What are all of the reasons you do not have answers to these adoption-related questions?” and (b) “If applicable, please explain why you did not discuss the above issue(s) with your parent(s).” Adoptees’ responses to the above two open-ended questions yielded four themes and 10 subthemes representing reasons adoptees have not discussed adoption-related topics with their adoptive parents. These are outlined in Table 10. Each theme and subtheme, combined with quantitative data, enable readers to comprehend a vast array of reasons adoptees avoid discussing adoption-related topics with their adoptive parents.

Theme 1: Concern for Parents’ Feelings

The first emergent theme of reasons why adoptees do not ask their parents adoption-related questions is out of concern for their parents’ feelings. More specific, adoptees do not wish to (a) hurt their parents’ feelings, or (b) cause their parents to become upset due to their questions.

Table 10. Survey Questions and Emergent Themes Related to Research Question 3: If Adoption-related Topic Avoidance Occurs Within Adoptive Families, What are the Major Themes of Reasons That Adoption-related Topics are Avoided by Adoptees With Their Adoptive Parents?

Open-ended Survey Questions	
1. What are all of the reasons you do not have answers to these adoption-related questions? 2. If applicable, please explain why you did not discuss the above issue(s) with your parent(s).	
Emergent Themes and Subthemes	
Themes	Subthemes
1. Concern for parents' feelings	Hurt Upset
2. Fear of parents' thoughts	Inconsiderate Disloyal
3. Barriers	Communication Resources Unable to obtain information
4. They do not want to ask	Don't care /not that important right now Apprehension Not the right time Life is good
Closed-ended Survey Questions	
Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with how well each of the following reasons explain why you <u>ever</u> , <u>even once</u> , avoided discussing <u>at least one question</u> about your adoption with <u>either</u> one of your adoptive parents, at <u>any point</u> throughout your entire lifetime.	
Question	Theme #
I have not talked about at least one of these issues (your medical information, searching for any member of your birth family, contacting the adoption agency or attorney who finalized your adoption, etc.), because . . .	
1. It is emotionally difficult for me to talk to my adoptive mother or father about this issue.	3, 4
2. At least one of my parents may have thought of me in a negative way for asking.	2, 3, 4
3. I didn't want to change the nature of my relationship with either one of my adoptive parents.	1, 2, 3, 4
4. I didn't want to hurt at least one of my adoptive parents' feelings.	1, 3, 4
5. I wasn't sure if at least one of my parents would have responded to my question.	3, 4
6. It would have been inappropriate to talk about it.	2, 3, 4
7. I don't like talking about my adoption-related issues with at least one of my adoptive parents because those are thoughts I like to keep to myself.	2, 3, 4
8. When I asked questions in the past, it resulted in emotionally painful discussions for either me or at least one of my adoptive parents.	1, 2, 3, 4
9. I did not feel emotionally close enough to at least one of my adoptive parents to ask.	2, 3, 4
10. I wanted to avoid conflict with at least one of my adoptive parents.	1, 2, 3, 4

Subtheme: Hurt. Numerous adoptees explained how they have refrained from asking their parents questions because they do not wish to hurt their parents' feelings. Their concerns are illustrated below:

I have almost always avoided asking any questions to my bio mom because around age eight I asked a question about my bio dad and she told me that it hurt her when I talked

about it. I never brought it up again until this year (I am age 22). I only asked his last name in case I ever want to find him.

I've never asked. I know why my birth father wasn't there...he wasn't ready and apparently he never was ready for me. Also, I didn't want to bring up the subject to either my mom or my "stepdad" because I didn't want to bring up the past or hurt their feelings in any way.

Bio mom asked that we not discuss it because it hurts her. And at this point I just don't care about my bio father. He has known about me for 23 years and never tried to contact me or provide for me. He is not a father. My daddy (adoptive father) is the only father-figure I need in my life now. The past does matter, but I am choosing to live in the present.

Procrastination, hurting their feelings.

I don't want to sound accusatory or hurt anyone's feelings. Plus I don't want my own feelings to get hurt if the answer isn't what I want it to be.

I have never had the guts to bring it up without hurting their feelings.

I would like to express this but I fear that I would make family feel bad.

It took me 10+ years to finally ask all of the questions that I had about my adoption. The main reason that it took so long for me to ask my questions was that I was afraid to hurt my adoptive father's feelings and I didn't want him to think that I loved him any less even though I had a number of questions.

Subtheme: Upset. In addition to adoptees not wanting to hurt their parents' feelings, a few participants indicated they do not want to upset their parents, thus they have not asked their parents adoption-related questions. The following quotes support this subtheme:

I haven't contacted the social worker yet and didn't want to upset my mother.

I didn't want to make my mom worried and upset.

Every time I would bring it up my adoptive mother would get sad and sometimes cry.

A lot of it revolves around not asking my father questions as I would not want to upset him.

Similarly, closed-ended survey questions assessed nine reasons that adoptees may choose not to talk about adoption-related issues with their parents (see Table 11). These reasons were

formulated from prior topic avoidance research regarding other types of relationships (Afifi, Caughlin, & Afifi, 2007; Caughlin & Afifi, 2004; Golish & Caughlin, 2002; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a & b). These data (see Table 11) reveal that adoptees do not discuss certain topics concerning their adoption because they want to avoid hurting their parents' feelings ($n=74$) or avoid conflict ($n=47$) with their parent(s). One participant's statement sums up these two reasons, "If I didn't (ask) it was usually because I did not want to hurt their feelings or start a conflict." Of noteworthy importance is that more participants reported that they disagreed with all of the reasons for engaging in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents than those who agreed with the reasons for topic avoidance listed in this closed-ended survey. These findings suggest that perhaps fewer participants engage in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents than those who discuss such topics with their parents.

Table 11. Adoptees' Reasons for Not Talking to Parents about Adoption-Related Issues.

Reason for Not Talking to Parents	Completely Disagree ¹ <u>No./%</u>	Generally Disagree <u>No./%</u>	Disagree <u>Total Number</u>	Generally Agree <u>No./%</u>	Completely Agree <u>No./%</u>	Agree <u>Total Number</u>
Not hurt feelings	58/34	21/12	79	27/16	47/27	74
Relationship change	67/39	19/11	86	29/17	36/21	65
Emotional	74/44	22/13	96	30/18	30/18	60
Too personal	74/43	24/14	98	34/20	24/14	58
Avoid conflict	88/50	20/12	108	21/12	26/15	47
Painful discussions	90/53	17/10	107	29/17	17/10	46
Responsiveness	90/53	26/15	116	24/14	14/8	38
Negative thoughts	95/56	23/14	118	21/12	15/9	36
<u>Not close enough</u>	<u>109/64</u>	<u>18/11</u>	<u>127</u>	<u>15/9</u>	<u>15/9</u>	<u>30</u>
Total Number	745	190	935	230	224	454

¹1=Completely disagree, 2=generally disagree, 3=generally agree, 4=completely agree (5=not applicable is not shown in this Table).

On the other hand, adoptees' concern for their parents' feelings is consistent with finding from prior research showing that individuals avoid certain topics to protect others (Afifi, Caughlin, & Afifi, 2007; Caughlin & Afifi, 2004) and relationships (Caughlin & Afifi, 2004; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a). It is also consistent with findings from Jones and Hackett (2007),

where adoptive parents acknowledged unspoken rules concerning topics their adopted children do mention to them, such as adoptees' desire to search for their birth parents. In summary, it appears that these reasons for adoptees' topic avoidance with their parents, which have been detected in other relationship types, are also transferrable to the adoptive families in the present study. However, these reasons are most likely not the only reasons that explain why adoption-related topic avoidance occurs between adoptees with their parents.

Theme 2: Fear of Parents' Thoughts

Two additional subthemes emerged revealing that adoptees have not asked adoption-related issues of their parents because doing so may be interpreted as being (a) inconsiderate, or (b) disloyal to their parents.

Subtheme: Inconsiderate. Relatively little is known about individuals' reluctance to broach certain topics out of fear of being rude or inconsiderate of another person's feelings. However, as seen in these quotes, three adoptees believe it would be inconsiderate to ask their parents certain adoption-related questions:

I consider asking my adopted father and biological mother about my biological father to be rude.

I have never asked because it's something that has never been brought up in my twenty years....I also love my "adopted" father and since he is the only dad I know I feel like it would be disrespectful to ask about him when I have had everything I wanted in a dad in my adopted father. I'm also scared to ask because I don't want to upset my mom or learn that he didn't want me around or other factors like that.

Because I know that if I asked my adoptive parents, they would be extremely offended and I don't have the money.

The following comments also suggest that adult adoptees are fearful of what their parents will think of them if they express interest in adoption-related facts:

Because I don't want my parents to think I'm ungrateful.

They kept what I have from me for so long, I'm scared of what they will think.

I have chosen not to tell my parents about this because I feel like they may criticize me, and ask more questions than I am prepared to answer. Right now I am just curious and putting out some feelers I guess.

Even as a 22 year old, I haven't pursued that conversation because I don't know how to go about it. I have rehearsed in my head how I would ask my mom or dad to see my medical record. In general, the idea of "mental illness" is a taboo topic. I'm also worried about what they think of me asking for this information now.

Similarly, quantitative responses revealed that 21% of the participants ($n=36$) *generally* or *completely agreed* with this statement, "At least one of my parents may have thought of me in a negative way for asking (about adoption-related topics)." A review of topic avoidance literature did not uncover fear of being inconsiderate of others as a reason for topic avoidance. However, both of these fears may be related to other previously detected reasons for topic avoidance, such as relationship protection, reducing feelings of betrayal, or inappropriateness of discussing the topic (Golish & Caughlin, 2002), and self protection (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995b). Thus, future researchers may wish to explore whether a fear of being inconsiderate of others is a reason for topic avoidance in other types of relationships.

Subtheme: Disloyal. In a related subtheme, participants commented that they do not initiate adoption-related conversations with their parents because they do not want their parents to think they want to replace them with their biologically-related parents. Following are a few of their sentiments:

I feel like if I pry too much about the subject they would think that I am interested in my biological parents more than them. I don't want to hurt them.

I don't want them to feel as though I don't think of them as my parents.

I didn't want them to think that I don't consider them my real parents.

My parents viewed this as I didn't love them enough.

Because I do not inquire. I consider my adoptive parents as my true parents and I love them very much.

Participants' feelings of allegiance toward their parents are similar to findings in previous studies with step families--topic avoidance with parents occurs to reduce feelings of betrayal or taking sides (Golish & Caughlin, 2002). One plausible explanation may be that adoptees in my study may fear that their parent-child relationship will change if they discuss certain issues concerning their adoption. This finding was also corroborated with the close-ended question indicating that 38% of the participants ($n=65$) avoided topics with at least one of their parents to avoid a change in their relationship (see Table 11).

In addition, participants in the present study said they do not talk about adoption-related issues with their parents, because doing so (a) could cause conflict ($n=65$), (b) might be too emotional ($n=60$), (c) was too personal to discuss ($n=58$), (d) led to past, painful discussions ($n=46$), (e) may elicit no response from a parent ($n=38$), and (f) was inappropriate for the type of closeness between the adoptee and his or her parents ($n=30$). Descriptive statistics are displayed in Table 11.

In summary, adoptees' responses to open-ended and closed-ended survey questions elicited reasons for topic avoidance cited by previous topic avoidance research, such as (a) hurting their parents' feelings, (b) causing their parents to become upset, (c) being disloyal to their parents, and d) avoiding conflict with their parents. In addition, the open-ended comments illustrated more reasons for adoptees' adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents, such as being inconsiderate of their parents' feelings and young adults attempting to establish their independence. For instance, one participant said, "I'm old enough to decide what I want to do with the information I have already gathered about my birth mom." Similarly, another participant said, "There are just things I have to find out on my own." The preceding statements are

characteristic of normal development during emerging adulthood—establishing independence and autonomy from parents via independent decision-making for self-exploration (Arnett, 1997; 1998). These statements may also provide alternative explanations for why emerging adult adoptees may choose not to communicate with their parents about adoption-related issues. In addition, children attempting to establish autonomy from their parents may be another plausible reason for topic avoidance among other relationship types involving young adults.

Theme 3: Barriers

Another prevalent theme emerged from the two open-ended questions—various types of barriers inhibit adoptees from conversing with their parents about adoption-related topics. These barriers include 3 subthemes (a) communication, (b) resources, and (c) an inability to gain access to information they desire.

Subtheme: Communication. Communication boundaries and rules exist in almost all relationships and generally they dictate the type of communication that takes place in different relationships (Vangelisti, 2004); these college students cited communication barriers as prohibitive reasons why they do not talk about adoption-related topics with their parents. The following quotes exemplify these obstructions:

My parents made it clear early on that this is not a topic of discussion.

They always resulted in a verbally abusive response.

Mostly because I do not ask the questions about my adoption and I am not sure what holds me back from asking those questions.

Because they made me feel guilty for asking the first time I asked.

My birth mother does not want to answer my questions. My birth father, I have now learned has passed away in the past couple years. Nobody in my family wants to discuss my birth father.

They understand that I do not like discussing it.

I have never asked and he isn't easy to talk to.

I'm not sure they want to give the real answer....

Nothing. I don't really want to talk to my adoptive father about it. He took on the burden of raising a child that wasn't his, even though he didn't have to. He made a lot of mistakes, but so did I. We have apologized (about a year ago) for the ways we treated one another and now have an even better relationship. I would never want to hurt him by bringing up the choices my bio mom made that have caused either of us pain. I would change communication with my mom about the situation. I would want to be able to ask any questions I have and know that they would be answered without backlash. Honest, open, respectful, positive communication is desirable.

Because my adoptive parents lack honesty, integrity, and would have felt insulted by the question.

Additionally, four participants wrote that they do not broach adoption-related topics with their parents because conversing about adoption-related topics with their parents is uncomfortable:

It is an uncomfortable topic.

It's awkward to discuss.

It is uncomfortable.

I do not feel comfortable enough.

These written comments are also substantiated by a closed-ended survey response where 34% of participants ($n=58$) indicated that they *generally agree* or *completely agree* with this statement, "I don't like talking about my adoption-related issues with at least one of my adoptive parents because those are thoughts I like to keep to myself." Table 11 displays these findings, which also converge with prior research that has identified communication boundaries and rules as barriers to communication on a variety of topics (Vangelisti, 2004). Similarly, the following remark exemplifies what 18% of participants ($n=30$) indicated in the closed-ended survey

questions—some adoptees do not feel close enough to their parent to discuss certain adoption topics:

I do not feel close enough to my parents to ask them these questions. I am not sure how I feel about the issue of searching for my birth parents, and do not want to draw them into the conversation.

Participants also described other obstacles that prohibit them from gaining answers to their adoption-related questions. Based on the multitude of responses to this open-ended survey question, “What are all of the reasons you do not have answers to these adoption-related questions?” two additional barriers were formulated (a) resources, and (b) an inability to obtain information. A lack of resources and an inability to gain information are not directly related to adoptees’ topic avoidance, but these factors may be plausible reasons adoptees avoid addressing certain adoption-related topics with their parents. For example, adoptees may have surmised that they or their parents did not have the resources to obtain the information, or no one could gain access to the information, resulting in adoptees avoiding the topics with their parents.

Subtheme: Resources. Six participants’ statements summarize adoptees’ barriers to resources and potential reasons for adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents:

I don't have the resources to answer them.

Because the thought of the hassle of going through the paperwork gives me a migraine.

I do not know where to begin or how to find the information I need.

Information is hard to come by. I don't have a lot of time or resources to allocate to it.

Because I don't have means to find out.

I have not had the money to spend on a fee for the adoption agency. Another reason is that I was adopted in 1965 prior to the practice of having birth parents write letters to the child. The only information I have of my birth parents was a letter I obtained from the adoption agency titled 'non-identifying information' that gave me things like their marital status, age, race, height, weight, etc.

Furthermore, many participants explained that they were involved in a closed adoption; hence, they are unable to gain access to information:

The main reason I do not have answers is because my adoption was a closed adoption and I have never really had the need or want to find my birth parents.

I am involved with a completely closed adoption.

My adoption was closed and I only know the name of my birth mom because my birth certificate was messed up at the hospital. She later had her address removed from all directories so it has been too difficult to contact her on my own.

Closed adoption in which my adoptive parents did not get to know about my birth family.

My adoptive parents have a limited medical history, and it was a closed adoption.

Because it is a closed adoption we do not have any information about my birth family's medical history or whether or not I have biologically-related siblings.

I have been told it was a closed adoption so my files regarding my adoption cannot be opened unless there is medical need or urgency.

Foster family withheld information, closed adoption but am aware that I have brothers and sisters and know my birth mother's name.

Other participants explained that being adopted from countries outside of the US is a hindrance to obtaining additional adoption-related information:

I will make the decision once I arrive in Korea.

Translation issues.

I was abandoned as a baby so little to nothing exists about my medical and family history. I was born in Peru, so I have doubts on how well I'd be able to follow-up on many of the questions I have.

Likewise, these next remarks exemplify how individuals and organizations are gatekeepers of adoptees' information:

My adoptive family does not want to let me know about my biological family.

Birth mother is blocking access to answers.

Catholic Charities would not give me the answers I sought.

My mother will not give me any information on my birth father. All I know is that I have two brothers and possibly more half-siblings.

Additionally, five participants explained that adoption records may have been insufficient at the time their adoption was finalized:

From what I have been able to put together, my biological mother was very young and did not provide much information during the adoption process.

Adoptive parents aren't sure.

My adoptive parents never received them, probably cause my biological parents didn't have them either.

I have already asked my parents and they simply don't have the answers because they asked the adoption agency when I was adopted and they did not have any records about any information like that.

My parents don't know and the filing was insufficient. Honestly, there just wasn't much information passed when I was sent to the orphanage.

Finally, these three quotes exemplify how missing people impede adoptees from gaining adoption-related answers:

My father passed away and I have not found anyone on his side of the family yet. Also, my birth mom was adopted as well so we are still trying to find her parents. Then we will be able to find out medical and heritage history as well.

My mother lost track of my biological father.

My parents can't find the lawyer.

In summary, these qualitative data demonstrate that adoptees have numerous obstacles prohibiting them from obtaining adoption-related information; communication barriers appear most relevant to adoptees' adoption-related topic avoidance with their adoptive parents.

However, resource barriers, closed adoptions, transnational adoptions, insufficient adoption records, gatekeepers, and missing people may also be associated with adoptees' topic avoidance.

For instance, if adoptees have already asked questions or have been told they (or someone else) cannot obtain additional information, adoptees may not initiate the conversation again, despite their desire for seeking the information. These barriers may also pertain to the responsiveness close-ended question, wherein 22% of participants ($n=38$) indicated they *generally agreed* or *completely agreed* with this statement, “I wasn’t sure if at least one of my parents would have responded to my question.” One possible explanation for this finding may be that if a participant had already discussed a topic with a parent, but the parent did not have answers, it would be reasonable to expect the adoptee to be uncertain about their parent’s responsiveness to any similar subsequent requests, thus eliciting adoptees to choose to avoid broaching the topic again with their parent(s). In fact, prior family adoption communication research demonstrate that adoptees do not attempt to seek additional adoption-related information, due to barriers resulting from language differences, international adoptions, closed records, parents, and agencies (Wrobel et al., 2003). Interestingly, this prior research does not address topic avoidance; thus, the present study extends adoption literature by furthering our knowledge of how these barriers prohibit or impede adoptees’ adoption-related conversations with their parents. Also, qualitative statements from the current study may lend a better understanding of additional reasons adoptees may avoid adoption-related conversations with their parents. Thus, this mixed methods study presents a bigger picture of the results, but also demonstrates that enhancements to the current survey instrument should include topic avoidance questions related to adoptees’ perceived barriers, such as a lack of resources and an inability to obtain further information.

Finally, numerous participants explained that they are not interested in uncovering adoption-related information; thus they do not ask their parents adoption-related questions. These findings led to the development of the subsequent theme:

Theme 4: They Don't Ask

One participant summed up all participants' responses by writing, "I have never asked." In addition, adoptees' written statements to this open-ended question, "What are all of the reasons you do not have answers to these adoption-related questions?" elicited these 4 subthemes of reasons participants don't pose adoption-related questions to their parents (a) don't care/not that important right now, (b) apprehension, (c) time isn't right, and (d) life is good.

Subtheme: Don't care/not important. Many participants indicated that seeking adoption-related information is not important to them. These six quotes illustrate adoptees' beliefs that facts concerning their adoption are not crucial for them to obtain at this point in their lives:

Concerning the questions I do not have (answered), I already know those answers or they are not as important to me.

While I know who my biological father is, I have not attempted contact him and do not wish to do so.

I don't care enough to look him up.

Because I wasn't 18 but now that I am it's my own fault for not asking because on some level I don't want to know anything.

I honestly don't really care to find my birth parents or family, nor am I really interested in it. It would be nice to know my medical history, but I haven't done so because it just hasn't really been that important to me.

I'm young and don't really care yet.

Additionally, this adoptee remarked:

I'm mostly pretty happy, and the questions are present, but they don't consume me at all. It's more of a curiosity, but I'm not so interested in the answers that I'd put the time and resources into pursuing the questions.

Subtheme: Apprehension. Another commonly referenced reason adoptees listed for not verbalizing adoption-related questions with their parent(s) is a fear of the unknown. The

following quotes demonstrate what adoptees think about discovering new information concerning their adoption or biologically-related family members:

I haven't had the courage to ask them.

Not ready to confront my birth parents.

I spoke to my birthmother on Easter day 2005. She told me, without pulling any punches, that she tried to abort me three time and her attempts almost killed her, so she decided to let me live. She told me she never loved me or had any parental feelings toward me. She told me she never wondered what happened to, or cared. So I have questions, but I have not looked for answers because that conversation hurt.

Nervousness.

I don't believe I'm ready for that step yet. I would like to be more emotionally, financially, and mentally ready. I only hope that when I'm ready it's not too late to get the answers.

Fear of asking.

Mostly that I'm afraid of what I would find out. Maybe my birth mother is someone I wouldn't respect, maybe her reason for putting me up for adoption would be difficult to swallow.

I'm not sure I want to know (who my biologically-related father is) because it would be devastating if it was someone I know or knew in the past.

I have been too nervous to ask my parents these questions. I don't know why because I know they would be ok with me asking them and they would give any answers I wanted. I just feel like asking about my birthparents would in some way make them feel like I am looking for something they cannot give me, which is not the case at all. I really have no reason not to ask, I suppose I just feel like it's never the right time.

These apprehensions have been noted in other literature. For instance, Lifton (1994) discusses adoptees' fears and fantasies concerning their unknown birth family members. However, adoptees' fear of unknown information may also explain why they avoid talk about these issues with their parents. Thus, fear or apprehension might be another viable reason for topic avoidance that could be explored in future topic avoidance research with families rearing children to whom they did not give birth.

Subtheme: Not the right time. Some participants also mentioned that they are not motivated to seek adoption-related information at this time:

I want to wait until I am at a point in my life when I have something to show to my birth parents, letting them know that I have accomplished something that I may not have had opportunities to complete if they had not given me up. I am going to hear in a in a week whether or not I got into Vet School at ISU... I graduate with a bachelor's degree in Animal Science in May of this year...

I might look for answers this summer.

Just lack of need, nothing has become dangerous or possibly life threatening for me.

I have never had any health complications to have to dig deeper into my medical history and do not like discussing the adoption or my birth father so I have never attempted to answer questions about him or his family.

I haven't felt an urgent need to do so. I may someday, but I am not sure when.

I have never felt strongly enough about it to contact the attorney who arranged it.

I do not feel that the answers are critical to my health and happiness at this time.

The reason I don't have any of those questions is because the information I have regarding those topics is more than sufficient for me.

Based on the preceding and subsequent findings, researchers should further explore how, when, and why adoptees seek additional information and whether or not any of these factors also correlate with adoption-related topic avoidance between adoptees and their parents.

Subtheme: Life is good. The following four comments illustrate how adoptees believe they do not need additional information to make them happy; therefore, they do not inquire about their adoption:

Because I don't want anything to do with it. My life is fine the way it is...

Never really asked because I felt that my life was good and that I didn't need to ask.

...but I don't really want to know anything, I am happy as is.

I have not pursued the answers enough. If I wanted to, I could have them all answered for me today. I choose not to look back on past decisions made in my life that I did not have control of, although I think they were the right decisions.

Finally, these last four quotes demonstrate that adoptees are satisfied with their families and do not have any interest in their adoption or biologically-related family members:

I have two sets of family-adoptive and the in-laws. I don't need another.

My parents have been pretty open in letting me know that the information is available if I ever wanted it, but I have never had the desire to search those things. For me, my family is the one that has raised me, cared for me, and who have shaped me into the person I am today. Not to sound harsh or insensitive, but I have no other family, I have known no other family.

Some, I honestly do not care about. I have a loving family who cares for me and I care for them. That's all that matters.

I'm not ready to live with the answers for the rest of my life. I don't want to feel obligations towards people who aren't a part of my life.

Based on these qualitative comments, it appears that many participants do not ask their parents adoption-related questions for many reasons, such as (a) they don't care to know information, (b) they fear of the unknown answers to their questions, (c) they do not think it is the right time to ask the questions, and (d) they do not think adoption-related answers will enhance their life. Interestingly, a few participants' comments revealed that they would like to ask questions, but they have chosen not to do so because of the aforementioned reasons. Hence, it appears that some of these reasons are also indicative of adoptees engaging in topic avoidance. Finally, it may be prudent to further examine these four subthemes to determine how they are related to topic avoidance within adoptive families.

Research Question 4:

What, if any, adoption-related topic avoidance gender differences are evident between adoptees' topic avoidance with their adoptive mothers and adoptive fathers?

Because previous topic avoidance research suggests that there are gender differences between females and males in the topics they avoid with their mothers and fathers, research question four was devised to explore possible gender differences within adoptive families. Thus, qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed to determine female and male adoptees' topic avoidance with their mothers and their fathers; the emergent themes are illustrated in Table 12.

Table 12. Survey Questions and Emergent Themes Related to Research Question 4: What, if any, Adoption-related Topic Avoidance Gender Differences are Evident Between Adoptees' Topic Avoidance With Their Adoptive Mothers and Adoptive Fathers?

Open-ended Survey Questions	
1. If you could ask your adoptive mother one question about your adoption, what would that question be? 2. If you could ask your adoptive father one question about your adoption, what would that question be? 3. If applicable, please describe at least one adoption-related issue or question you wanted to discuss with either of your adoptive parents but chose not to do so. 4. What are all of the reasons you do not have answers to these adoption-related questions? 5. If applicable, please explain why you did not discuss the above issue(s) with your parent(s).	
Emergent Themes and Subthemes	
Themes	Subthemes ¹
1. Adoptive father's emotional involvement 2. Adoptive father's relationship with adoptees 3. Communication issues	
Closed-ended Survey Questions	
Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with how well each of the following reasons explain why you <u>ever</u> , <u>even once</u> , avoided discussing at least one question about your adoption with <u>either</u> one of your adoptive parents, at <u>any point</u> throughout your entire lifetime.	
Question	Theme #
I have not talked about at least one of these issues (your medical information, searching for any member of your birth family, contacting the adoption agency or attorney who finalized your adoption, etc.), because . . .	
1. It is emotionally difficult for me to talk to my adoptive mother or father about this issue.	1, 3
2. At least one of my parents may have thought of me in a negative way for asking.	3
3. I didn't want to change the nature of my relationship with either one of my adoptive parents.	1, 2, 3
4. I didn't want to hurt at least one of my adoptive parents' feelings.	2, 3
5. I wasn't sure if at least one of my parents would have responded to my question.	1, 2, 3
6. It would have been inappropriate to talk about it.	1, 2, 3
7. I don't like talking about my adoption-related issues with at least one of my adoptive parents because those are thoughts I like to keep to myself.	3
8. When I asked questions in the past, it resulted in emotionally painful discussions for either me or at least one of my adoptive parents.	1, 2, 3
9. I did not feel emotionally close enough to at least one of my adoptive parents to ask.	1, 2, 3
10. I wanted to avoid conflict with at least one of my adoptive parents.	1, 2, 3

¹. Note: No subthemes were detected.

A few emergent themes regarding gender differences were evidenced from participants' open-ended responses. Participants' comments to the five open-ended questions displayed in Table 12 reveal uncertainties regarding their adoptive father's level of commitment to choosing

adoption. Moreover, participants wrote about their relationship with their adoptive father and communication differences they experienced with their parents, which led to the development of each of these themes (a) emotional involvement, (b) relationship with adoptive father, and (c) communication differences.

Theme 1: Adoptive Father's Emotional Involvement

The subsequent statements illustrate participants' curiosities concerning the reasons their adoptive fathers decided to adopt them. These three remarks are from participants who were adopted by their stepfather:

If he did the adoption for us or for my mother.

Does he regret changing his life style in order to raise a child?

Did you have good intentions when you decided to adopt me or was it to remove my biological father from both my mother and my life?

Two participants who were adopted from countries outside of the US also had questions about their adoptive father's input into making the decision to adopt:

What did you think you were gaining when you decided to adopt me?

I would ask him in what ways did he support my mother's decision.

Finally, one participant who was adopted within the US, but not from foster care, expressed a similar question:

How do you feel about having to adopt children?

Theme 2: Relationship With Adoptive Father

Some participants acknowledged that they are uncertain about how their adoptive father feels about their adoption or their parent-child relationship. The following seven comments illustrate these uncertainties made by participants who were adopted by a stepfather:

Why did you decide you wanted to adopt me so I would be considered your legal child rather than just your step-child?

Did you mind marrying a woman who already had a kid and then adopting the kid?

I have already asked why he did it (adopted the participant). And he responded 'To give you a chance at having a father.' I guess now, it would be do you regret adopting me, as he is no longer married to my mother.

Does he regret changing his life style in order to raise a child?

Why would you never bring it up that I'm not technically your child?

I would actually have a conversation about how all the paper work got put together and what actually made my father want to adopt me.

In a related statement, this female participant, who was adopted domestically, would like to know what her adoptive father thinks about their relationship:

Do you think that because I'm adopted we aren't as close as we would be if I was your biological daughter?

Another participant, who was adopted from a country outside of the US, wrote:

Have I been a good son?

Likewise, this next participant, adopted from foster care, wants to know what his adoptive father thinks about adding another child to their family:

Are you glad you brought me into your family?

Not surprisingly, a majority of participants relayed very similar questions and comments for their adoptive mothers. However, of noteworthy importance is that the preceding quotes were the only discernable differences between questions participants would like to ask their adoptive fathers, not their adoptive mothers. Hence, gender differences between questions participants want to ask their adoptive father and mother emerged from the qualitative data. Also, the similarities of questions among all adoption types lends further insights to the commonalities between those who are adopted from the US, from foster care, from countries outside the US, and by

stepparents. In conclusion, future research should explore topic avoidance gender differences among adoptive families to assess the generalizability of these findings to other groups of adoptees.

Theme 3: Communication Differences

Participants also mentioned that their communication with their father has been somewhat difficult or different when compared to communications with their mother. A thorough assessment of the qualitative data revealed differences and similarities within and between adoption types. The first three answers were made by participants who were adopted domestically:

Why he never talked 'bout it (adoption).

My adoptive father is not emotionally secure enough to answer any questions about my adoption.

I really never talked to my dad much about adoption – although if I did – he would have listened and been supportive.

The next statements were made by participants who were adopted by a step father:

All questions I have ever wanted answered I would have asked my bio mother...

I would never ask my adoptive father any questions about the adoption. The only question I would even consider asking is why he made the decision to become legally (and emotionally) responsible for a child at such a young age (23 when my parents [bio mom and adoptive dad] got married).

I would not ask my adoptive father any questions; I would ask my bio mom.

I avoided talking to my adoptive dad about my real father because I felt that my adoptive father would look down on my birth father since he was big time alcoholic.

Finally, one participant explained why he didn't talk to his adoptive father, but also mentioned that he would like better communication with his biologically-related mother:

...I don't really want to talk to my adoptive father about it. He took on the burden of raising a child that wasn't his, even though he didn't have to....I would never want to hurt

him by bringing up the choices my bio mom made that have caused either of us pain. I would change communication with my mom about the situation. I would want to be able to ask any questions I have and know that they would be answered without backlash....

The qualitative data offer insights into communication gender differences between adoptees and their mothers and fathers. Specifically, the preceding subthemes demonstrated communication differences that adoptees reported having with their fathers, but not their mothers. These data also substantiated the quantitative data, whereby participants reported 662 times that they *rarely*, *sometimes*, *frequently*, and *always* avoid discussing certain adoption-related topics with their adoptive mother, compared to 815 times with their adoptive father (see Table 7). Despite the larger number of participants who had adoptive fathers, versus adoptive mothers, marginally significant gender differences were also evident. For example, a one-way MANOVA (see Table 4) revealed a difference which almost reached statistical significance ($p = .051$) in the amount of adoption-related topic avoidance that adoptees (sons and daughters combined) reported with their fathers and with their mothers; overall, participants engaged in slightly more topic avoidance with their fathers than with their mothers. The estimated marginal means of sons' and daughters' self-reported topic avoidance with their fathers and mothers are also depicted in Figure 3. In addition, a test of between subjects effects of adopted males' and adopted females' level of topic avoidance with their parents (mothers and fathers combined) revealed no significant differences by gender of adoptees in the amount of their topic avoidance with their parents. Thus, male and female adoptees showed no difference in the amount of topic avoidance with their parents (see Table 5). These findings are discrepant from other communication research, which has shown that males engage in more topic avoidance than do females (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a), and that adoptive mothers are typically more communicative with their children about adoption-related issues, than are fathers (Wrobel et al., 1998).

Findings from the current study offer significant additions to the topic avoidance literature; prior research has also shown that children (11-17 years old) engage in more topic avoidance with both their fathers and their mothers (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a, 1995b) and that male children engage in more topic avoidance with both of their parents at all ages concerning relationship issues when compared to female children (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a). While this present study did not explore age differences concurrent with gender differences, the current findings may add to existing literature by demonstrating that emerging adults do not engage in topic avoidance to the same extent as do adolescents and that emerging adults may engage in the same amounts of topic avoidance with their mothers and their fathers.

In a previous adoption communication study, Freeark et al. (2008) found that mothers engaged in more adoption-related communications with their young children than did adoptive fathers. In addition, those authors reported that mothers who believe that rearing adopted children is different from rearing biologically-related children discussed adoption with their children more frequently than did mothers who believed there is no difference in rearing adopted and biologically-related children. Although this current study did not involve adoptive parents, future studies should explore how and/or if these communication differences are related to children's age, types of adoption, gender of parent and/or child, and/or parents' beliefs.

On the other hand, results from the current research are congruent with Golish and Caughlin's (2002) findings that children involved in stepparent relationships did not engage in significantly different topic avoidance with their mothers or their fathers. Additionally, results from this study are encouraging in that approximately one-half of these participants do not engage in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents. It will be important for future

researchers to further examine whether these findings are transferrable to other adoptive families and relationship types.

In addition to the findings that substantiated answers to survey questions 1-4, participants wrote a multitude of open-ended comments throughout the survey. Thus, an Additional Findings section is presented due to an overwhelming majority of participants who reiterated similar sentiments throughout this research. The following results emerged from participants' comments to the four open-ended questions outlined in Table 13.

Additional Findings

Eight themes and four subthemes are outlined to supplement the understanding of family adoption communication processes from the perspectives of adopted adult college students (see Table 13). Each theme and subtheme is presented with qualitative and quantitative data to allow readers to determine the significance of these additional findings.

Theme 1: Gratitude

An extremely prominent theme that resonated among most participants' open-ended comments was feelings of gratitude. Thus, the following subthemes were identified (a) thankful to birthparents, (b) thankful to adoptive parents, (c) thankful for the option of adoption, and (d) overall gratitude to the researcher for conducting this study to gather adoptees' experiences, opinions, and thoughts.

Subtheme: Thankful to birthparents. Many participants mentioned that they are grateful because their birthparents made an adoption plan for them. Following are participants' remarks expressing gratitude for their birthparents' decisions:

The only thing that I know about my birth mother is that she was a minor when I was born. Her courage and generosity provided me with the best mother and father anybody could ever dream of having. If we ever were to meet I would thank her a million times.

...I respect her decision and am happy with my life, so hopefully she is too.

...thanks for the life she has provided.

I would ask her why she put me up for adoption and thank her for the wonderful life she gave me by giving me up.

I'm thankful that my birth parents were aware that they could not care for me and that they recognized the need to give me up for adoption.

Thanks for having me!

I am really glad I was adopted. I am very thankful that my birth parents realized that they couldn't provide enough for me, and that I was adopted into a loving home.

I was born to a 16 year old teen mother. She was not ready to have a family. I am SO thankful she put me up for adoption, because I got the best family I could ever hope to have. I was raised by a mom and a dad who love me just as much as if I were biologically theirs. I have had the best life and wouldn't have it any other way.

Subtheme: Thankful to adoptive parents. Many adoptees also mentioned gratitude for their adoptive parents' decisions to adopt them:

...I would thank her for adopting me.

I don't think I have a question, just thanks.

...Only thanks for everything he's done for me.

I have the best parents in the world. I do not want or need anyone else.

Table 13. Additional Emergent Findings Related to Adoptees' Overall Opinions, Thoughts, and Advice Concerning Adoption and Family Adoption Communication Processes.

Open-ended Survey Questions	
1. What, if anything, would you change about your adoption-related communications with either of your adoptive parents? 2. What advice would you give adoptive parents about how to best communicate adoption-related facts with their adopted children (what and how much information, how frequently, at what age, etc.)? 3. Please add any additional comments, opinions, questions or thoughts you have about parent-child communications concerning adoption.	
Emergent Themes and Sub-themes	
Themes	Sub-themes
1. Gratitude	To birth parents For adoption To adoptive parents Overall gratitude
2. Early, open- honest, age-appropriate communications	
3. Curious	
4. Don't be offended	
5. On-going, proactive, adult-directed communications	
6. Uncomfortable	
7. Positive messages ¹	
8. Favorable experiences	
Closed-ended Survey Questions	
Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with how well each of the following reasons explain why you <u>ever</u> , <u>even once</u> , avoided discussing at <u>least one question</u> about your adoption with <u>either</u> one of your adoptive parents, at <u>any point</u> throughout your entire lifetime.	
Question	Theme #
I still have unanswered questions regarding...	
1. My adoption	1, 4
2. Why I was placed for adoption	1, 4
3. My medical history	1, 4
4. If my (adoptive) parents know where my biological parent(s) live	1, 4
5. Any member of my birth family	1, 4
6. Searching for any member of my birth family	1, 5, 6, 7
7. Meeting any member of my birth family	3, 4, 6, 7
8. The attorney or agency that finalized my adoption	1, 4, 5, 6, 7
9. Whether I have biologically-related brothers or sisters	1, 4, 5, 6, 7
Please choose the response that best represents your opinion of each statement. There are no right or wrong answers.	
1. I think my life is better because I was adopted as opposed to being raised by a member of my birth family.	2, 9
2. I would recommend adoption to others.	9
3. Placing a child for adoption is looking out for the child's best interests.	2, 9
4. A birth family who places a child for adoption is looking out for the child's best interests.	2, 9
5. More birth parents should be educated or given choices about how to place their child for adoption.	2, 9

¹Note: The emergent theme of positive messages was not addressed by any closed-ended survey questions.

Subtheme: Thankful for adoption. In addition, the following quotes illustrate adoptees' positive adoption-related experiences. The following four participants stated they were grateful for being adopted:

I am really glad I was adopted. I am very thankful that my birth parents realized that they couldn't provide enough for me, and that I was adopted into a loving home.

I am very grateful that I was adopted...

I have thought about how different my life would have turned out had I grown up in Korea possibly with parents who either could not or did not want to raise me. Here in (name of state) with my family, I have grown up just like any other kid, and I've had opportunities that I thank adoption for every day.

I think this (adoption) is a very good option as opposed to "termination." There is always an option and I am thankful my birth parents chose life. If birth parents feel the need for another choice other than caring for the child themselves then it is the right choice to give a child up for adoption.

Likewise, four participants wrote that being adopted gave them a vast array of opportunities that they might not have had if they were not adopted:

I feel that adoption saved my life. I had a very unstable home life as a child and was adopted as an older child. I feel that it (adoption) gave me opportunities in life I would have never had, such as having a loving, supportive family to go to.

I think that adoption was one of the best things that happened to me. My birth mother was not married when she was pregnant with me and she wanted me to have a father, mother, and siblings. She made the decision that she felt was best for me. I am very thankful that she made that decision. I have grown up in a wonderful family with both a mom and dad and 7 siblings. My family adopted me and 4 of my siblings. Adoption gives children a chance to live in a loving home that provides for their needs.

I feel an overwhelming sense of sadness when I think about them (biologically-related parents), especially my biological mother, who was just 16 when I was born. I know that she suffered a great loss, but I am glad that she made the choice that she did. My mother, at the age of 40, had so much to teach me and share with me. More, in fact, than even the most sophisticated and loving 16 year old could ever have to share.

I am so happy to be adopted because I know that my birth mother could not raise me. I was very sick and probably wouldn't have made it if I didn't have the medical needs I needed.

Also, many participants mentioned that their birth parents were too young to care for them. The following statements illustrate these participants' appreciation for adoption and for their birth parents' decisions:

I feel very fortunate that I was adopted due to the fact that my birth mother was 15. I believe that every situation is different and you can't base judgments on a person's personal beliefs.

Being an adopted child, I believe that adoption is fantastic. My birth parents were only 17 years old when I was born and they gave me the best gift they could by giving me the parents who have done so much for me. I know my life would not be what it is today without them making the decision that they did.

I was given up for adoption due to my parents being at a young age when conceiving me. In this case I can appreciate what they did and for adoption being an option. I think it's a great choice for parents who are too young or don't seem fit to care for a child during the present state of their lives. I completely agree with the choice of adoption.

Finally, these two comments summarize the overwhelming majority of participants' positive opinions and thoughts concerning adoption:

(Adoption is) a good practice, something that I'm glad my birth parents were willing to do for me.

I am really happy with my life and it's because of my adoption. I have great parents...Adoption is an excellent way for families who "accidentally" have a child or just are unable to properly provide for a child. I would recommend it also for people who can't conceive. Of the adopted people I know, probably 10 people, all of their parents are good people and love their kids like their own.

Interestingly, numerous participants across all adoption types deemed it important to relay their overwhelming appreciation for many aspects of adoption, such as to their birthparents, to their adoptive parents, for the option of adoption, and for the present study. These results are also consistent with findings from phase 1 (Baltimore, 2007), wherein almost every adoptive parent expressed gratitude for being afforded the opportunities to add to their family through adoption and for their children's birth parents' decisions to make adoption plans. A majority of parents in the phase 1 study said they were eager, committed, and thankful for being able to

become parents. This finding is also similar to findings by Hamilton, Cheng, and Powell (2007); they concluded that two-adoptive parent families may be more committed to parent, when compared to parents from other family types.

The *National Survey of Adoptive Parents (NSAP)* telephone survey of adoptive mothers ($n=1651$) and adoptive fathers ($n=423$), conducted between April, 2007 and July, 2008 (Bramlett, Foster, Frasier, Satorius, Skalland, Nysse-Carris, et al., 2007), has shown similar results--87.3% of adoptive parents ($n=1824$) said that having their adopted child in their life has affected their family very positively ($n=1575$) and somewhat positively ($n=249$). In the same survey, 51.7% of adoptive parents ($n=1079$) acknowledged that having their adopted child in their life was better than they expected it would be and 34.3% of parents ($n=717$) reported that their experiences with their adopted child were similar to what they thought they would be. The *NSAP* included only adoptive parents whose children were adopted from the U.S. foster care system ($n=763$), from private domestic sources ($n=781$), and from countries outside of the US ($n=545$).

Findings from the current study add to our existing understandings by sharing the voices of adult adopted children, thus demonstrating similarities between findings from adopted adults' and adoptive parents' beliefs that adoption is an overwhelmingly positive experience. Also, this study supplements adoption literature by demonstrating comparable findings with the *NSAP*, but from the perspectives of adopted adult adoptees, individuals who were adopted by stepparents, and those who were conceived via assisted reproductive technologies. Subsequent research should further explore this phenomenon to determine its generalizability to other adoptees and other adoption types, such as kin, assisted reproductive technologies, and stepparent adoptions.

Subtheme: Overall gratitude. In addition, a significant number of participants summed up their adoption-related experiences and opinions with expressions of overall gratitude. The following five quotes exemplify participants' thankfulness for being adopted:

...I am thankful.

It's a lot better than abortion I suppose. Glad I was adopted into the family I have.

I'm glad they (birth parents) did (chose adoption). It would have been hard for both me and them raising me at the age of 17.

I'm glad I was adopted, but have no concerns, questions, issues, or cares about it.

I never met my birth parents and I've always had a view that there had to be a reason for being put up for adoption and if it is TRULY the best for the child and they want them to have a better life than I feel it is the right thing to do, but if they are doing it simply because they have other reasons that might be "frowned upon" then I think it is not the right thing to do also I am only 20 years old and never been married and had children I have seen that parenting is NOT easy it's going to be challenging at times.

Likewise, two participants explained that being adopted is like a gift:

Adoption to me is simply the greatest gift I have ever been given because it's my experience

For me, being adopted by my parents was and still is a gift that keeps giving. I love my parents and our relationship.

In addition, four participants expressed their gratitude for this current research:

I am glad there is interest in the subject of adoption. It has been considered a taboo subject for far too long.

VERY eager to help with the second part of your study... contact me!

I think this is a great idea, and good start.

Thank you for doing this. Important topic.

Four other participants shared their thoughts about the present study:

I would complete further surveys, time permitting.

Good Job.

Good survey.

Thank you for the venting session.

This emergent theme is also congruent with findings from phase 1 (Baltimore, 2007) of this study, wherein adoptive parents were also extremely interested in participating in further studies and helping others learn the positive aspects of adoption. Few studies have explored adoptive parents' or adult adoptees' overall thoughts and experiences concerning adoption; thus these findings fill gaps in current adoption research literature.

Participants offered numerous answers to these two survey questions (a) "What advice would you give adoptive parents about how to best communicate adoption-related facts with their adopted children (what and how much information, how frequently, at what age, etc.)?" and (b) "Please add any additional comments, opinions, questions or thoughts you have about parent-child communications concerning adoption." Because the responses may be of value to future research and implications and because participants reiterated many similar comments throughout the survey, data from these responses were also coded and categorized into emergent themes. These themes include adopted college students' recommendations that adoptive parents (a) engage in early, open, honest, age-appropriate adoption-related conversations, (b) change their parent-child communications (c) understand that adoptees are curious, (c) refrain from being offended if adoptees ask questions and be amenable to answering adoptees' questions, (d) conduct ongoing, proactive, adult-directed communications, (e) understand that adoption-related discussions may be awkward for adoptees, and (f) relay positive messages about adoption to adoptees.

Theme 2: Early, Open, Honest, Age-appropriate Conversations

More than 30 participants advised adoptive parents to engage in early, open, honest, age-appropriate adoption-related discussions with their adopted children. These quotes illustrate adoptees' suggestions for early-telling and age-appropriate dialogues:

Tell them as early as they are able to understand. I grew up knowing I was adopted, I don't remember a time when I didn't know that. So it is not painful or emotionally difficult for me because I know no different. And let them know everything they want to know, don't have hard feelings, because it is only hard on everyone. Let the child know you love them just the same.

Always make sure to talk about it even if they don't understand. My adoptive parents never kept anything from me. I knew about it before I could ever understand. They were always open to meeting my birth family. They would answer any questions that I had and answered to the best of their ability. Open communication is always the best policy.

I liked that my parents were very open about talking about it. They told me when I was really young and didn't really understand what it meant. But they talked to me again when I was older and explained everything and let me ask questions. The problem was that they honestly did not know most of the answers to my questions. I believe being open and honest about everything lets the child decide how they feel about it.

Disclose the adopted status at an early age, 5 or younger, and answer questions in an age appropriate way as the child matures. Do not restrict any information. Support child's interest in meeting or obtaining information about his/her biological parents. Or if there is no interest in such things, as there was none with my adopted sister, support that too.

I think this would depend on the child and how he/she thinks. For me, I enjoyed just being blunt and honest. When the child asks, be direct. Although I could see my parents were somewhat "emotional" they were honest and addressed the issues regardless of how they felt at the time. We both came to appreciate the honesty and I think that allowed me to be more honest and open with them.

Comments from nine participants illustrate their recommendations for parents to be open and honest with their children:

Be completely honest with your adoptive child. Do not wait until they are too old to tell them. To be honest, I don't ever really remember not knowing I was adopted. I can't remember the day when my adoptive parents told me, but I know I was very young.

Be open, honest and willing to communicate when the child is ready.

Be open to questions.

Since I can remember, I have known that I was adopted. I think this made it really easy for me to accept because I knew it all along. I didn't feel like anyone was trying to hide anything from me, and I understood that adoption was a good choice for my biological parents. Therefore, I do not view my biological parents in a negative light either...

...if you can't tell them the information they want to know just tell them that you can't and the reasons for that.

Never hide facts. Tell the children what they want to know. I don't remember my parents ever sitting me down and telling me I'm adopted, not from the US and that's why my skin is a different color. Let children grow up knowing their (sic) adopted and why they may be different from other family members.

Like I said, I don't distinctly remember a time when I did not know. I don't believe it is something that needs to be discussed regularly, because it isn't something that the child is going to forget, at least if they truly understand what it means when you tell them the first time. Also, always be willing to talk about the matter with them, the chances may not happen too often, and when they do, truthfully answer every question to the extent of your knowledge.

I really liked the way my adoptive parents approached it. They had been keeping all of the information about my birthparents in a file. While I always knew I was adopted and always had questions answered when I asked my adoptive parents, I was to have a file of information that I could go through, on my own. I'm not sure what birthday it was, but when I was mature enough to really take the information to heart, my parents gave me all of the information (e.g. letters, genetic information, artwork, gifts, etc.) that my adoptive parents had sent to me over the years. I didn't go through it that often, but every now and then, when I wanted to, I was able to open that box in my bedroom closet and go through any information I wanted. It was nice to have that independence.

Interestingly, three participants explained how dishonest, late-telling, parent-child adoption communications might affect adoptees:

I think it is really important for this channel of communication to be really open. If it's not, I feel that an adopted child could turn their unanswered questions into self-hate.

I believe that the key is open communication between parents and their adopted children. If a child is afraid to ask questions about their background, it could make them feel isolated, unloved, or inferior to the biologically related people in their adopted family.

I think that my parents hid information when I was younger a bit, and I didn't like that I found this out later in life. Sometimes I am happy my parents kept things from me though, so I didn't have to worry about so much family when I was younger.

Just talk about it. Don't be afraid of not being a "real family" because you don't share biology. It's worse in the long run if you keep it from your kids and "surprise" them when you think they are old enough to understand. The less of a big deal that (you) make it the less of a big deal that it is.

Participants' recommendations and additional comments are consistent with other work that has documented the importance of adoptive parents engaging in open, honest, age-appropriate, adoption-related conversations with their adopted children (Brodzinsky, Pappas, Singer, & Braff, 1981; Eldridge, 2009; Triseliotis, 1973; Triseliotis & Smith, 1985) and telling children about their adoption at a young age (Melina, 1998). Additionally, these quotes provide insights into how parent-child communications may impact adoptees' overall well-being. More important, these suggestions are invaluable because they are from the perspectives of adopted adults.

These adopted adult college students' statements also corroborate findings from phase 1 of this study, wherein all 16 adoptive parents said they engage in early, open, and honest adoption-related conversations with their adopted children (Baltimore, 2007). Also, five out of eight families from the phase 1 study reported only telling their adopted children adoption-related information based on their children's current cognitive abilities (Baltimore). Interestingly, even though the adopted adults' advice and recommendations are congruent with other findings, many participants in the present study indicated that these recommendations were not practiced by their own parents, which is reflected in the next emergent theme. Thus, it appears imperative to reiterate the importance of adoptive parents providing early, open, honest, age-appropriate conversations throughout the family life cycle, including emerging adulthood.

Theme 3: Changes to Parent-child Communications

In response to this open-ended survey question, “What, if anything, would you change about your adoption-related communications with either of your adoptive parents?,” approximately one-third of the participants’ answers signified a desire for communication changes with their parents. For instance, one participant mentioned that more frequent conversations and the ability to ask adoption-related questions would be beneficial:

Maybe more frequent, ask the questions I wasn't able to. Overall though, I am content with how things have been so far with my case.

Likewise, many participants stated they would have preferred more open communications with their parents:

Both my parents are very open about my adoption but I would like to see my mother become more open in talking about my biological father. So far in my life she has never once said anything about him and because of this I am scared to talk to her about it.

I would make the communications about my bio parents much more open.

I wish they would let me talk about my adoption, my biological family, my history. I wish I could go to Korea and find my birth parents without worrying about hurting their feelings.

Maybe I would've been more open with them about my search for my birthparents.

I wish I could've been more open to discussing it.

I would change communication with my mom about the situation. I would want to be able to ask any questions I have and know that they would be answered without backlash. Honest, open, respectful, positive communication is desirable.

As seen in the next quotes, five participants would have liked more adoption-related conversations at a younger age:

I would've wanted to know more a lot earlier.

I wish my parents had told me what they knew/suspected after I graduated high school - perhaps even earlier.

I think that I would probably have had an "adult talk" as soon as me and my sister were to the age where we understood the reasons for adoption. I learned tidbits about my adoption throughout my life only through medical reasons....

I would've asked more detail about the adoption process when I was younger rather than finding out when I was in my later teens. Also, would've tried for a one-time conversation about what they know about my biological family rather than get bits of pieces over many years that doesn't always seem consistent.

I wish we had been even closer and been able to talk about things when I was younger.

The next statements illustrate how three participants believe it is now "too late" to ask questions:

I would not change anything except...my adoptive mom passed away and now I do not have the chance to ask questions that I might ask now.

I would have asked them questions a long time ago. Now I feel it's too late.

I probably would have asked more questions when I was younger; but I didn't start truly thinking about the deeper questions until I came to college. Even now, I feel somewhat hesitant to ask because I don't know how to bring it up. I also think about my parents' reactions e.g. asking themselves "why are you asking these now?"

Three participants shared concerns they have about communicating with their adoptive father:

I think I wish I could have talked to my father about it more because I am not sure how he feels about all of this. Also, I wish my parents would have encouraged me more to look into my adoption history.

Wish I was more apt to talk to my father.

Have some, if any, communication lines between me and my adoptive father.

Also, two participants expressed these sentiments:

They kept a lot from me and told me in very in opportune times things that could have used a lot more of an "introduction" than the blunt truth.

I would want to have an open adoption!!!

One participant wishes she would have had more discussions with her parents about searching for birth family members:

The one aspect of my adoption that my parents and I rarely talked about was meeting my biological family. I never had an interest in seeking them out so it didn't seem necessary to discuss. One day last summer my biological mother contacted me and the past year has been very difficult for me and my parents. Maybe if my parents and I had prepared for a scenario of this sort, the whole ordeal could have been easier on us.

The following five statements demonstrate how adoptive parents may have responded to previous inquiries their children posed concerning adoption-related issues, thus creating barriers for further conversations:

I just wish my mom didn't take my inquiries as an insult. I just want to know where I came from origin wise. I would never change my life.

I'd like my adoptive parents to know that I would like answers to some questions, but that does not mean I don't think of them as my parents, or family.

I wish that they had collected more information about my biological family and that they were emotionally stable enough to share this information with me.

I would like my mother to be able to talk to me about my adoption without thinking I am attacking her mothering ability. She is a great mother, and she will always be MY MOTHER... but I still feel like I am missing a part of myself not knowing where I come from.

I think I've and I have heard my mom say that I have no desire to look for my biological parents. This is overall true. I do not. However, as I've grown older and have dealt with some personal issues and moved through them, it would be interesting for me to know at least the basics about my biological family such as medical history and so on.

Statements from two adoptees indicate that they are interested in obtaining additional information for identity exploration, but they have not broached this with their parents:

...but I still feel like I am missing a part of myself not knowing where I come from.

Maybe asked about going to some heritage camps to learn about my mother country.

Because more than one-half of the adult adoptees who responded to the aforementioned question indicated changes they would like to have made with their parent-child communications, it may be valuable to more clearly define communication openness for adoptive families. For example, participants advise adoptive parents to initiate, promote, and

invite frequent adoption-related dialogues, without barriers, across an adoptee's life span.

Admittedly, this advice was not employed by many of the participants' parents. Thus, these recommendations appear invaluable for facilitating and defining open communication within adoptive families.

On the other hand, approximately one-half of all participants who responded to the question said they do not desire any changes to their adoption-related communications with either of their adoptive parents. The following statements elucidate participants' satisfaction with their parent-child communications and what they would want to change:

Nothing. I am completely happy with the communication I've had with my adoptive parents on the matter.

I wouldn't change anything! I love my adoptive parents. They never spoke negatively about my adoption, and they have never pressured me to talk about anything I don't want to. I don't know if they necessarily understand the feelings I have about my adoption, but I know they are there to talk about it with me if I ever want to.

Nothing. Both of my parents have always been supportive of any of my questions, searches, etc.

Nothing. We have a wonderful relationship and I wouldn't change it for the world!

Nothing. I have had the best communication with my parents.

Nothing, my parents have always been very open about my adoption with me. Even showing me paperwork to look at such as my adoption papers and birth certificate.

Nothing they are my family they are my parents.

Nothing. We have a totally open and honest relationship.

Nothing! I have been blessed so much with the life I have now that I wouldn't change anything in the world for it!

Nothing, my adoptive parents have been extremely caring and compassionate towards me.

These findings are corroborated by the quantitative data reported in Table 7 and outlined under research question 2, theme 5, wherein participants indicated that they have not engaged in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents.

Theme 5: Curiosities

Likewise, participants expressed the importance of parents understanding their children's curiosities. The subsequent comments illustrate adult adoptees' concerns about parents who do not facilitate honest conversations, or support adoptees' interests in discovering more, about their adoption or biologically-related families:

Be honest and accepting of the questions. Try not to be defensive. Adoptees will be curious and have a right to know their adoption.

Simply, be very weary of hiding facts. Knowing that I'm inherently different from the rest of the family (and possibly the surrounding community), I want to be able to know why and if it's possible to find a biological parent.

Don't keep it a secret. Keeping it a secret implies you regret the adoption, and that's just foolish.

Five participants explained how adoptees' curiosities are almost inevitable; thus, parents should assist their children in uncovering adoption-related information:

I think as long as the parents are completely up front from the beginning and are willing to assist their adoptive child in any way they desire related to their adoption there shouldn't be any problems.

I think the parents should always be open to talking about the child's adoption. It is a huge part of a child's life and the child should not feel limited when wanting to talk about adoption. Parents that are considering adoption should be aware that these issues will arise and should be prepared.

If you are planning on adopting a child, you should know that there are going to be many questions that your kids are going to ask. Make sure you talk to them, and make sure they know they can come talk to you about anything.

Adoptive parents should not pit the child's curiosity against personal feelings. Honesty is always the best policy.

I cannot say it enough: FROM THE BEGINNING be HONEST with age appropriate information about EVERYTHING. Do not dissuade children from asking about the facts of their lives. They have a right to know.

Numerous participants also wrote similar answers to this survey question, “Please add any additional comments, opinions, questions or thoughts you have about parent-child communications concerning adoption.” Despite the fact that participants had already made comparable statements throughout the survey, I deemed it important to report these reiterations to impress upon readers that adoptees are curious about their adoption-related circumstances. Adopted college students’ verbatim, written responses indicate that adoptees generally want to know about the circumstances surrounding their adoption, birth family’s history, and genetic ties. Following are participants’ additional recommendations for adoptive parents:

Be forthcoming with any and all information that the child wants to know. Understand that they are not asking to hurt your feelings, but because they want to know where they came from or why they are where they are.

Let the children know in a subtle way at an early age that they are adopted. Then, as a naturally curious child he or she will be able to ask as many adoption related questions as they want without any inhibitions that may come from telling them later in life. I can't imagine having a period of time that I didn't know I was adopted, and it seems as though it would be a devastating fact to find out later in life.

If your adoptive child asks any questions about their biological parents you should answer all of them. Tell your kid everything they want to know about there (sic) biological parents because if you don't it will result in emotional and mental damage as they grow up.

Openly give information because curiosity is natural. It happens with every child and is best when it is informative, rather than a question session that you leave open. It's easier to understand adoption when all curiosity is cleared.

My adoptive parents informed me at 7 because they felt I was mature enough to understand... I think the age which a child is mature enough in their parents' eyes is when they should tell them, but speak with an open mind and make sure the child knows you'll love them just the same if they are curious to ask questions.

Participants also answered this closed-ended survey question, “I still have unanswered questions regarding (a) my adoption, (b) why I was placed for adoption, (c) my medical history, (d) if my (adoptive) parents know where my biological parent(s) live, (e) any member of my birth family, (f) searching for any member of my birth family, (g) meeting any member of my birth family, (h) the attorney or agency that finalized my adoption, and (i) whether I have biologically-related brothers or sisters.” Results indicated that out of all of the topics posed in the closed-ended questions in this current survey, 66% of participants ($n=114$) have the most unanswered questions concerning their medical histories. Additionally, 31% of participants ($n=54$) still have questions about their adoption and why an adoption plan was made for them; 53% ($n=92$) have questions regarding a member of their biologically-related family; 47% ($n=82$) have unanswered questions regarding searching for any biologically-related family members; 51% ($n=81$) have questions regarding searching for any biologically-related family member; and 22% ($n=22$) have unanswered questions regarding the attorney or agency that was involved in the participants’ adoption proceedings, and only 21% ($n=37$) wonder whether or not their adoptive parents know where their biologically-related parents live. Table 14 summarizes these data.

Table 14. Adoptees’ Unanswered Questions.

Unanswered questions	Yes #/%	No #/%
My adoption	54/31	115/66
Why I was placed for adoption	54/31	120/69
Medical history	114/66	59/34
If my adoptive parents know where bio parents live	37/21	78/137
Any member of bio family	92/53	82/47
Searching for any bio fam member	82/47	92/53
Meeting any bio family member	89/51	85/49
Attorney/agency	39/22	134/77

Adoptees’ desires to know more about their adoption, birth families, and genetic health histories (Baltimore, 2007; Baltimore & Crase, 2010; Eldridge, 1999; Wrobel & Neil, 2007) and

adoptive parents' desires for adoptees' genetic health histories (Baltimore, 2007; Delpier, Tarantino, Anderson, 2006) have been substantiated by prior research. As indicated by Wrobel and Neil (2007), and via these participants' statements, adoptees' curiosities do not necessarily mean that they want to meet their birth parents, but rather the curiosities appear to be characteristic of normal adoptee development. However, based on the participants' written statements, additional parenting education concerning adoptees' curiosities may elicit more parent-child adoption-related conversations and reduce adoption-related topic avoidance between adoptees and their parents. These qualitative data also offer communication prompts of topics adoptive parents should discuss with their children across their family's life span.

Theme 6: Don't Be Offended

Participants also explained that adoptive parents should not take offense to adoption-related questions posed by their children. This notion is under-studied in adoption research, but has been acknowledged in parenting books (Eldridge, 1999; Melina, 1998). For instance, many adopted college students reiterated that adoptees are merely curious about their adoption-related circumstances:

If they (adoptees) ask don't take offense to it, it's not in a negative way.

I've known throughout my entire life that I was adopted. I think that is the best way to go about it. If adoptive children have questions, please don't think that they are trying to replace you... they are just trying to find a missing piece to the puzzle of who they are.

I think it is extremely important to be supportive about any questions the child has. They are NOT trying to say they don't like the parent just that they are curious about where they came from. I learned early on in life, so I grew up knowing the truth which made it very easy for me to cope with the fact that I was adopted. It is just important for the child to be comfortable with who they are and where they came from.

The fact of adoption should never be hidden or apologized for. The child is not at fault for being adopted, nor should he be made to feel that way. How his life started cannot be changed. What he does with his life is totally open....Be forthcoming with any and all information that the child wants to know. Understand that they are not asking to hurt your

feelings, but because they want to know where they came from or why they are where they are.

... I would also tell them that you (the adoptive parents) would not be hurt if they choose to try and contact any of the birth family members. (Although in my experience I was disappointed by what I discovered about my biological father's family, and I am much better off being adopted.)

That just because their adopted child is interested in their birth family does not mean they don't love them, and it is not a judgment on their parenting skills.

Finally, this 42-year old expressed her strong feelings about parent-child communications:

Just answer their frickin' questions! Stop being so selfish and thinking about what it's going to do to you. What is your child going to do, run away? YOU are their parents. YOU raised them. They most likely see you as their parents, and as their parents they are coming to you for answers. They trust you. But when you keep secrets and create an environment that does not allow for dialogue, they will learn not to trust you with certain feelings and information. Get over yourself and see a counselor for your insecurities as a parent. Then talk to your kid.

The frequency of this advice made by adult adoptees reveals its importance in adoption research, adds to the current adoption literature, and illustrates its significance in future adoptive parenting education curricula.

Theme 7: Ongoing, Proactive, Permissible, Adult-directed Communications

In addition, participants recommended communication methods resembling previous research findings--that family adoption communication is a recurrent process that occurs across a family's life span (Nickman et al., 2005). Of noteworthy importance is the notion that many adoptees in the present study suggest that adoptive parents initiate ongoing conversations with adoptees due to the potential awkwardness of adoption-related conversations:

Don't wait for them to come to you, take the initiative and talk to them about it. Start at an early age and ask them if they want to know anything and give example of questions you could answer.

Tell them if they ask, and don't sugar coat it unless you have to. If they don't ask, ask them if they want to know or discuss anything about it.

I would start out at a very young age making sure they understand they know they are adopted or in my case I have dark skin and my parents are both white, so it was obvious. Also sit down with them and let them ask whatever questions they might have about adoption and how it works because I think children get a better understanding at a young age about it all and that way when others ask you as you get older (which they do) you can have an idea of how to handle the situation.

The parent should be the one to talk to the kid. Just make sure you're listening and watching for signs of discomfort from the child. Some discomfort will be present because it's pretty uncomfortable to talk about.

Many other participants said that parents should verbalize permission for their children to discuss adoption-related issues at all times:

Tell children early on...teach children about all different families. Everyone is different. My parents made it alright for my brothers and I to ask questions and search for birth families.

...Let them know that they are free to ask questions whenever they want and be completely honest with them.

Be completely open from day one and throughout their life. Make sure they know that it's alright to ask questions and if they want (or are able) to meet their biological family.

However, parents should still have conversations letting the child know that it's alright to ask questions and learn about their story.

Be sure to let them know that they can talk to you about it whenever.

Make sure the child knows that the topic is ok to talk about.

I would tell adoptive parents to be very open about the fact that they adopted their child, and to answer any questions they have to the best of their ability. If the child asks questions that the parents don't know the answer to, I would tell them to seek out the information if they think it would help the child, or explain to the child why they don't know and can't tell them.

I would make it an open issue, not all an awkward-to-discuss topic.

Let them know that you really love them and don't mind them asking questions.

...My parents did not keep it a secret and we always knew who we were and could find out more if we wanted to.

...Let them know that it's (adoption) not a bad thing and that if there is any topic that they would like to discuss about it they should be fully understanding and wanting to hear what they have to say.

These findings are consistent with prior research (Melina, 1998), but based on participants' statements woven throughout these results, it appears that not all parents grant their children permission to discuss adoption-related questions. It is also evident that participants' parents are not initiating enough conversations with their children. For example, the following quote demonstrates what many participants expressed -- they have to start adoption-related conversations with their parents, as opposed to their parents broaching the topics with them:

My parents never avoided giving me information but we just didn't really talk about it unless I asked. In that case, my mother was very open about anything I wanted to know.

Hence, this advice should be emphasized to adoptive parents and those who work with adoptive families. Additionally, another participant advised parents to be forthcoming with all information when an adoptee becomes a teenager:

By the time they are a teenager they need to know everything. That way they won't have questions later in life, and they'll know that you are comfortable talking about it.

This recommendation may thwart adoptees from feeling it is too late to ask questions once they become adults, as evidenced in the present study. This advice may also promote family well-being by prompting parents to facilitate more adoption-related conversations as adoptees become teenagers and emerging adults. In fact, if the parents of the three oldest females (ages 9, 11, and 13 years) in the phase 1 study had initiated more frequent adoption-related conversations with their daughters, their children might not have had unanswered questions that they chose not to discuss with their parents. Thus, future research should explore the efficacy of parents broaching adoption-related discussions with their children throughout their children's lives.

Theme 8: Uncomfortable

Similarly, participants agree that parents should initiate adoption conversations with their children because these dialogues are uncomfortable for adoptees to bring up:

I think that when kids ask, you should give it (information) to them. And always start the discussion so that children aren't afraid to ask.

I think that a child should be emotionally stable before a lot of facts are revealed.

Children should grow up knowing a little bit if it is a closed adoption and slowly make their way to the more informative facts. I do wish that my parents would have been more comfortable talking with me about finding my birth parents. I always didn't want to hurt feelings and my mom would always get uncomfortable when I talked about things too much.

Be honest, ask them if there is anything they want to know because it is very possible they are afraid to ask.

I would just say to always be open with your child and when they ask questions about it answer them as honestly as you can. I think it's important for them to know at a young age that they are adopted and that you are willing to share that information with them when they're older/ready to know. I feel this way because if you aren't open with them from the start they may feel like you don't want to tell them or they may feel uncomfortable asking later on in life.

...Asking may not seem like a good idea to the child, but a lot of times they really want to know.

In addition, two participants suggest that adoptive parents maintain written, adoption-related documents to alleviate the awkwardness of verbally communicating about this sensitive topic.

Here are their comments, "Keep good records." and "Write everything down, that way you will not have to verbally communicate. It is incredibly awkward."

These findings are consistent with prior research which showed that adoptive parents and their adopted children had very different opinions concerning adoptees' difficulties in discussing adoption-related content with their parents (Beckett et al., 2008). In conclusion, numerous adoptees explained that adoption-related conversations with their parents can be awkward;

previous research indicates that when adoptees feel uncomfortable discussing adoption-related issues with family members, their overall well-being, identity formation, and adjustment are adversely affected (Rosenberg & Groze, 1997). In addition, evidence suggests that adoptees' discomfort in discussing adoption issues with family members can have adverse effects on a family's overall well-being. Melina (1998) acknowledged that adoptees may be uncomfortable discussing adoption-related issues with their parents. However, advice from participants in the present study may offer new insights and identify novel suggestions for maintaining ongoing adoption-related communication between parents and their children, such as (a) keeping written records, (b) remaining mindful of adoptees' awkwardness in broaching adoption-related topics, (c) granting ongoing permission to discuss adoption-related issues, and (d) facilitating adult-directed conversations.

Theme 9: Relay Positive Messages About Adoption

Participants also advised adoptive parents to speak positively about adoption to their children; this notion has been documented in previous adoption literature (Melina, 1998). Following are participants' recommendations for parents to discuss adoption in a favorable manner:

...I also remember my parents telling me that it is special to be adopted. My mother has a saying, and I don't know where she got it, but she always says, "Most of the world's children were conceived unplanned, but nobody could ever be adopted by accident." I have always been made to feel special and that my adoptive parents ARE (sic) my parents.

Start talking about it even if they are non-verbal. In my case my parents cooed into my crib how lucky they were to have gotten me, and what a wonderful woman my birthmother was for wanting the best life possible for me. They always told my brother and me we were the best gifts they had ever gotten.

I would say try to put the biological parents in a good light even if the kids were removed from their home, something like, "Your mom wanted to be a good mom, but she was to sick to take care of you (or that's why she hurt you), but as horrible as that was we get an

opportunity to be a family, and we won't treat you that way, we want to protect you from that kind of situation (then be prepared to prove that every day)."

From the very beginning be open with the child and answer whatever questions the child has. By taking away the stigma the child will feel like the situation is more normal.

Tell your children early on about the adoption and the process you went through to adopt them. Then remind them how much joy they bring to your life that you wouldn't have if you had never been granted permission to adopt them.

Interestingly, previous literature cautions against solely talking positively about adoption; Melina (1998) acknowledges that children may have additional thoughts or emotions concerning their adoption, such as feelings of sadness or of loss. Thus, this advice warrants further exploration in adoption research, since participants in the current study did not express feelings of loss or sadness regarding their adoption-related experiences.

Participants also explained how adoptive parents should communicate to adoptees that they are loved, wanted, and were given a better life:

Let them know it's okay and they are loved even more because they are adopted.

... They need to be able to understand that they were given up because their birth parents cared for them, not because they were not wanted.

Keep the communication lines open with your adopted children. It is important for them to know where they came from and what got them to where they are now. The children should not feel abandoned by their birth parents, they need to be reminded that they are loved and wanted.

Let the child know as soon as they are able to understand that they are adopted, and that they are adopted because their birth parents loved them, and wanted them to go to a better home.

I would let them know they were adopted from the earliest point in their life. Let them know that their birth parents couldn't support them but they were gracious enough to give them up in order to give them a better life.

A few adopted college students' positive remarks about adoption emphasize their opinions that blood relations do not create family bonds:

...Be kind about it, reinforce that they love them, and that blood is not what creates bonds, but love.let them know it is ok to ask any questions they may have.

Up front constantly and as far as any concerned you are their parent you just didn't give them their genes.

....If they ask tell them the truth. Also explain that a parent is not a person that biologically delivered them but instead it is the one who raises you to become the person they become.

The prior statements are similar to emergent themes from adoptive parents and their children in the phase 1 study (Baltimore, 2007)—most reiterated their beliefs that biological ties need not prevail when determining who should parent a child and that adoption is a positive way to build a family. Comments from 2 mothers in the phase 1 study sum up all of those parents' responses:

“Mother 5: If we were going to pick the highest priority (for educating people) it would be that biological ties need not prevail, always, and in fact, sometimes it's the most inappropriate thing to do I think that there's still a big piece of society that thinks we shouldn't have to do it (adoption). I think it goes back to some of the stuff we were talking about with the Human Services systems and that sort of view of children as property and not having rights of their own....There was sort of a stigma that was attached to it. I think we are going away from that.” (p. 46)

“Mother 8: You know, that whole, blood is thicker than water? You know when people talk about blood relations being so important....For us, it's not the blood that is important it's the value bond that we establish.” (p. 67)

Additionally, the children in phase 1 shared their definitions of a mother (Baltimore, 2007); these adopted children explained that a mother is not someone who necessarily gives birth to a child, rather she is the person who rears her children, regardless of biologically-related ties. Here are four children's definitions of a mother:

“Someone who cares about you and loves you and comforts their kids. They're here to help us, let us learn, teach us, and takes care of us.” (p. 53) (statement by a 9-year-old male).

“A mom is somebody who takes care of children and loves them.” (p. 53) (statement by a 7 year-old male).

“The person that raises you from childhood.” (p. 53) (statement by a 14-year-old male)

“Someone that takes care of you and they tell you that they love you.” (p. 53) (statement by an 11-year-old female).

Similarly, one young woman from the phase 1 study (Baltimore, 2007) made a distinction in her definitions of a birth mom and a mom:

“I guess your birth mom is the mom who gave birth to you but mom is the, basically, parent or guardian....Mom, I think of as a parent or guardian who takes care of you, hopefully a female.” (p.53) (statement by a 13-year-old female).

Of noteworthy importance is that not one child in the phase 1 research indicated that a mother is someone who gives birth. Thus, results from the present research corroborate findings from phase 1 (Baltimore, 2007)--many adopted college students also contend that love is what creates families and bonds, not blood relations. Last, here is one adopted college student's opinion of adoption:

...just because genes are share with someone else it doesn't make them your parent it just give you a DNA ties. Natures determine your true parent.

Results from both studies provide considerable evidence to suggest that adoption is a favorable method of building or adding to families.

Theme 10: Positive Adoption-related Conversations, Experiences, and Opinions

Because prior research has shown that the positive aspects of adoption-related research are understudied (Brodzinsky, 2006), this final theme, which resonated among participants' responses, fills gaps in current adoption literature. At least one-half of the participants who wrote comments to this open-ended survey question, “Please add any additional comments, opinions, questions, or thoughts you have about parent-child communications concerning adoption,” elicited the final emergent theme—many adopted college students report positive adoption-related parent-child conversations and experiences and they have favorable opinions of adoption.

Here are a few of their statements:

My mother was never afraid to talk about my biological father. This should be the same with any family, regardless of emotional pain, etc.

I don't feel like it hurt their feelings when I asked questions. It felt like they just wanted me to make a decision on my own with as many facts as they could provide. They left the decisions up to me.

I've had an exceptional experience regarding my communication experience with my adopted parents concerning adoption.

The following quote exemplifies how this participant's parents portrayed adoption:

My parents had a children's book made for me that told me I was adopted and it said my name in it. I still have it, they read it with me lots of times, and it tells me how much God loves me and how much they love me, and that there's no difference or anything wrong with me just because I was adopted.

One participant also recommended that adoptees (or adoptive parents) seek outside resources for assistance with adoption-related issues:

There are plenty of opportunities out there in the adoption community. If you have concerns or questions, talk with them, usually there is a wide age of adoptees to talk to about things, or how they grew and developed their sense of self.

This comment is congruent with previous studies, which have demonstrated a positive relationship between communicative openness and adoptees' healthy adoptive identity formation (Howe & Feast, 2003; Stein & Hoopes, 1985); this advice is also corroborated by research which demonstrates that parenting education and seeking additional resources are beneficial for the well-being of all families and their children (Atkinson & Gonet, 2007; Smith, Cudaback, Goddard, & Myers-Walls, 1994).

Additionally, these participants explained that adoption is a positive option for birth parents and prospective adoptive parents:

It (adoption) shouldn't be a stigma, and it shouldn't be something people don't talk about. I think all parents should raise their kids knowing that adoption is an option. Both for unwanted pregnancy AND for having kids.

I wish more low-income women would see adoption as a viable choice instead of believing adoption is only for "weak" people who can't take care of their kids.

Finally, in response to this open-ended survey question, "Your opinions and experiences are very important to enhancing others' understanding of adoption. Please provide your additional comments, thoughts, or opinions below," numerous participants expressed their favorable adoption-related opinions and experiences:

I am a huge proponent of adoption. I have had a great life and a great family because of it, something that may not have been true had my birth parents not had the consideration to give me up for adoption.

I think no one else will ever fully understand adoption unless they have been adopted. You have to experience it to feel the wonder, joy, and passion.

Adoption to me is simply the greatest gift I have ever been given because it's my experience and yes others are adopted but no two stories are exactly the same and no two people view adoption in the same way.

For me, being adopted by my parents was and still is a gift that keeps giving. I love my parents and our relationship.

Because of adoption, I have an amazing life full of opportunities.

If adoptions they way you want to go and you know you can give a kid a better lifestyle than they would have had previously then go for it, but if you raising a kid is something you can't afford financially or have time for then wait until you can. Don't put a kid in a less than par living environment and make them suffer because you just wanted to be a parent.

I just think it's an awesome thing, and it's not presented as an option to hesitant parents enough.

Domestic adoption should be promoted more.

Adoption is a great thing!!

Additionally, 139 participants wrote similar comments concerning their experiences and opinions regarding adoption when they answered this survey question, "What are your opinions about adoption?" The following diverse statements give readers an idea of the wide range of positive comments participants shared:

My opinions about adoption are very good. I believe that adoption is a very positive thing, because if I were not put up for adoption then I would not have as good of a life.

It is for sure the best thing that could have happened to me.

... The decision to give me up for adoption will probably always be the best decision my life has ever faced.

...Glad I was adopted into the family I have.

I think that adoption was one of the best things that happened to me. My birth mother was not married when she was pregnant with me and she wanted me to have a father, mother, and siblings. She made the decision that she felt was best for me. I am very thankful that she made that decision. I have grown up in a wonderful family with both a mom and dad and 7 siblings. My family adopted me and 4 of my siblings. Adoption gives children a chance to live in a loving home that provides for their needs.

I think it's a great option for birth parents who feel like they have no options, especially for those who do not want to abort. Sometimes that option is not shared so mothers think they either have to raise the child or abort. Adoption is a nice middle ground. For kids who might otherwise end up with parents who do not want them, it is a great option.

I think adoption is a wonderful opportunity for families who desire a child and cannot conceive. It is a blessing to be able to give a child a better life than he/she may have received. Adoption provides birthmothers the reassurance that their child will be given the chance of a better life that she may not have been able to provide. It is amazing to be accepted into a family, who though they are not blood related, can love you unconditionally and focus on who you are and not where you came from.

For me, it was the best option. Because I have such a favorable view due to my circumstances, I generally view adoption as a wonderful option. It allows children to be born and provides those who wish to raise children the family they desire...

I believe that it is a truly selfless act of the biological parents and shows true love and responsibility towards their child. Not only is it the best option for the child, it potentially creates a family for a couple who is unable to have children of their own.

Numerous participants said that they have had many opportunities they do not believe they would have had without having been adopted. The next two quotes illustrate their beliefs:

...I've been blessed to be adopted into a family that cared for and loved me and that provided me with opportunities that I don't believe my birth parents could have provided.

Adoption is a wonderful gift, and has given me more opportunities in my life than I ever would have had if I had not been adopted.

Additionally, six adoptees' explanations that they have had a better life because they were adopted converge with the subtheme "thankful for adoption":

I completely understand why my parents gave me up for adoption. My adoption resulted in me having a better life, better education, and the tools to become successful. I know my birth parents love me because they were looking out for what was best for me.

I think that in some cases it can and is a good thing. In cases like mine, I don't regret being adopted because I have had much better life because I was adopted...

Because of adoption, I have an amazing life full of opportunities.

I think the action of adopting a child is great. It's giving that child a whole new, better life with a loving family who actually wants and will appreciate the child.

There is no doubt in my mind that I am a better person having an adoptive father than none at all.

...Also, being adopted from another country, it is especially hard to find information on family. It has its pros and cons but I'd never want it any different if given the chance to do it again.

Usually when a mother strongly feels like she is not fit to raise a child she is generally right and the child would probably be better off in another parents care.

Several participants mentioned their favorable experiences related to being adopted from countries outside of the US:

Being adopted, I feel like it was a gift from God. I have been truly blessed with the life I have now, and I can't imagine my life any other way. Coming from a rather poor country I occasionally look to back and think how different my life would be and it is something no one really understands unless they have been adopted. I think adoption is a wonderful way for a couple who are trying to have children of their own and simply cannot due to health reasons. There are many children out there that need care that their birth parents cannot give them and I hope adoption continues to grow in years to come.

Overall, I feel that adoption is definitely a great thing. For me personally, there was no question that it was better for me to be adopted rather than staying in a foster home (in South Korea) and in a culture that was unaccepting.

Similarly, this participant explained the benefits of being adopted from foster care:

I feel that adoption saved my life. I had a very unstable home life as a child and was adopted as an older child. I feel that it gave me opportunities in life I would have never had, such as having a loving, supportive family to go to.

Likewise, a few participants shared their positive circumstances related to being adopted by a stepparent:

Personally, my adoption did not affect me in a significant way. My step-father (married to my birth mother) adopted me because he wanted the family to be together completely. There is no doubt in my mind that I am a better person having an adoptive father than none at all.

For me it was good because my "step-father" felt more like a dad than my biological father who I had never met. I feel that in all situations it is important to weigh what is best for you and your family.

Finally, a couple of participants said they plan to adopt or have already adopted a child:

I think that adoption is amazing. I think it gives kids a chance. I plan on adopting a child when I am older.

My spouse and I have adopted internationally, so you could say we think it's a good idea.

The present study provides evidence that numerous adult adoptees view adoption in a favorable manner. In fact, 139 participants offered open-ended responses to share their positive adoption-related opinions, thoughts, experiences, and parent-child communications. These results converge with findings from the phase 1 study (Baltimore, 2007), wherein every adoptive parent ($N=16$) explained their adoptive parenting experiences as positive. In fact, a majority of the parents used words such as "blessed" and "rewarding" when they described their adoptive parenting experiences. These results also corroborate data from the *NSAP* which found that 95.7% of adoptive parents ($n=1999$) said that they would recommend adoption to others. Thus, these data provide considerable evidence to suggest that many adoptive parents and adult adoptees deem their adoption-related experiences in an extremely favorable manner.

Quantitative data from the present study's closed-ended survey questions inquiring about participants' overall adoption opinions also elicited similar findings. For instance, 62% of participants ($n=112$) *completely agreed* and 22% ($n=40$) *generally agreed* that their life is better because they were adopted. Similarly, 71% of participants ($n=129$) *completely agreed* and 19% ($n=35$) *generally agreed* that they would recommend adoption to others. Table 15 outlines participants' opinions about adoption.

Table 15. Adoptees' Opinions About Adoption.

Topic	Degrees of Agreement ¹				
	Completely Agree #/%	Generally Agree #/%	Generally Disagree #/%	Completely Disagree #/%	No Opinion #/%
Favorable media	27/15	113/62	19/10	3/2	20/11
Better life	112/62	40/22	7/4	3/2	20/11
Recommend adoption	129/71	35/19	7/4	1/1	9/5
Recommend to uncertain parents	74/41	61/34	27/15	15/8	5/3
Good option	126/69	38/21	10/6	3/2	5/3
Best interests	86/47	84/46	6/3	2/1	4/2
Need more education	106/59	51/28	6/3	1/1	16/9

¹ 0=No opinion, 1=Completely Agree, 2=Generally Agree, 3=Generally Disagree, 4=Completely Disagree

Hence, the phase 1 study (Baltimore, 2007), the *NSAP*, and the current study demonstrate evidence that numerous adoptive parents and adult adoptees report positive adoption-related experiences and that they are proponents of adoption.

Adult adoptees' statements depict options for future research and implications concerning methods of communication for parents to discuss adoption-related topics with their children. The majority of adoptees' suggestions have been documented in prior research literature, but this research demonstrates the necessity for other important corroborations to continue to be reiterated concerning parent-child adoption-related communications, such as adoptive parents should be proactive in initiating these discussions with their adopted children (Eldridge, 1999) and adopted children may feel awkward or uncomfortable asking questions (Eldridge 1999;

Melina, 1998). Also, because many participants described their parent-child adoption-related communications as being less open and frequent, and more avoidant when compared to professionals' recommendations and from participants' own parent-child communications advice, these issues warrant further investigation. In fact, findings from the present study demonstrate that if adoptees are not asking questions, adoptive parents should not assume their children do not have questions. One participant's quote from the present research sums up the adult adoptees' recommendations, "Don't wait for them to come to you, take the initiative and talk to them about it." Interestingly, this finding regarding the importance for adoptees of engaging in ongoing, adult-initiative conversations is incongruent with reports from parents in the phase 1 study (Baltimore, 2007) where adoptive parents reported that they wait for their children to ask questions, as opposed to parents proactively engaging their children in ongoing adoption-related dialogues. It is also incongruent with findings from the current study which found at least one-half of all participants indicated they engage in adoption-related topic avoidance with at least one of their adoptive parents. These data are contained in Table 7 and in qualitative comments dispersed throughout this paper.

Adopted college students in this study did not make recommendations indicating that parents should allow their children to express negative emotions concerning their adoption, and of noteworthy importance is that only a couple of participants shared less than favorable emotions, thoughts, opinions, or statements regarding adoption. Thus, it is imperative for adoption-related recommendations to be further researched and promoted to adoptive parents. It will also be beneficial to determine if adoptees have negative emotions concerning adoption, and if so, explore the best methods for adoptive parents to stimulate communications regarding the range of their emotions.

This study may offer new insights into how adoptees perceive the importance of positive portrayals of adoption, and hence, impact adoptees' overall well-being and parenting education initiatives. In summary, adopted college students advise adoptive parents to use a wide variety of methods for communicating with their children over the course of their lives.

Findings from phase 1 (Baltimore, 2007) showed that the three oldest females in that study had questions they had not communicated with their parents, which may be indicative of topic avoidance. Thus, if these three children's parents had initiated ongoing, proactive, adult-directed parent-child communications, the children might not have had unanswered questions or topics they had not discussed with their parents. Additionally, because I was unable to probe further with these participants, I was not able to determine why they did not discuss their questions with their parents. Thus, future research with these participants and future participants should include questions derived from these newly-discovered reasons that adoptees do not broach certain topics with their parents (e.g., worrying about hurting their parents' feelings, feeling uncomfortable initiating conversations, and so forth).

Finally, in order to present a thorough analysis of the data, it is imperative to report that many participants misread two open-ended survey items concerning questions they would like to ask their adoptive mothers and adoptive fathers. The following responses substantiate participants' misreading of the two questions and elucidate questions they would like to ask their biologically-related mother and biologically-related father. Interestingly, a majority of the misread comments were related to fathers, not mothers. The following two comments are the only evidence of the obviously misread question regarding adoptive mothers:

How her life is now, and if she's doing well. Not at all in a bitter way. I respect her decision and am happy with my life, so hopefully she is too....I wouldn't want to talk to him.

Same as previous (adoptive mother response), I have no real interest in meeting them. Not out of a hate feeling, just they're strangers and it doesn't matter to me what they're doing.

The remaining statements are questions participants would like to ask their biologically-related fathers:

Have you ever wondered what happened to me?

I don't know anything about my biological father, but I'd ask: What did you feel when I was put up for adoption? or Did you know that I was put up for adoption?

Not so much ask him a question, but tell him that I am sorry for waiting so long to meet him.

How often do you think about me?

Did you really think about giving me up or just go along with my mom?

Who are you, what are you like?

I would ask if he even knew I existed.

Nothing, I don't really care. I'd like to see what happened to him though, it'd be nice to know where my creativity and intelligence came from.

What were you like? I was told that he disappeared before I was born, but when I found my birth mom I found out he passed away when I was 1.

I guess I would ask him if I had any other siblings and if he had any "say" in putting me up for adoption.

Did you know about me?

Why'd you run?

I really have no interest in meeting my biological father, it is his loss. I am happy with our lack of communication.

Why did you choose to give me to another family?

Are you as hairy as I am?

Who's idea was it to put me up for adoption?

His role in the decision.

Why he felt the need to come into my life and create total chaos for me every other year or so?

In addition, one comment made at the end of the current survey corroborates the preceding data indicating that some of the questions may have been difficult for participants to read, interpret, or answer:

Some of the questions in this survey were worded in a confusing manner making them a little hard to answer.

These limitations and their implications for future research are addressed in the last chapter of the paper.

The multitude of additional comments that participants made concerning parent-child communications suggests that this is a crucial adoption-related facet affecting adoptive families over their lifespan. However, due to the lack of research on adoption, family adoption communication processes, and specifically topic avoidance within adoptive families, this study extends prior research by exploring adult adoptees' opinions and experiences concerning adoption, family adoption communication processes, topic avoidance, and reasons for topic avoidance, complemented by findings from the phase 1 research which explored adoptive parents' and adopted children's experiences.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

It is well-known that communicative openness affects the well-being of children and families, regardless of the type of family structure (Brodzinsky, 2006). However, relatively little is known about how to best facilitate communicative openness in all family types, including adoptive families. For instance, adoption literature is lacking concerning who should initiate adoption-related discussions, how the discussions should be broached, and how frequently discussions of adoption should occur throughout a family's life cycle. Thus, the principle aim of this study was to examine family adoption communication processes, and more specifically topic avoidance, from the perspectives of adopted adult college students.

In order to gather a large amount of data from adult adoptees to determine the transferability of findings from phase 1, the current research employed a sequential mixed methods design, wherein data collected from my thesis (Baltimore, 2007) contributed to the formation of research questions and instrument development for this study. Additionally, the present research used a triangulation design, whereby both quantitative and qualitative data were concurrently analyzed to complement each method's strengths and weaknesses (Greene, 2008), to examine four research questions and additional emergent findings. This research was significantly enhanced by exploring family adoption communication processes via a mixed method design. Specifically, the concurrent triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data offered a significantly better understanding of the complexities associated with adoption and adoptees' family adoption communication processes, which would not have been achieved by employing only one method of inquiry, such as solely qualitative or quantitative data.

Results derived from the current study (a) illustrate that it is imperative to continue to examine families rearing children without two birth parents and all of their members across the family life cycle, (b) fill gaps in current adoption literature by providing adult adoptees' perspectives about adoption, family adoption communication processes, topic avoidance, and reasons for topic avoidance, (c) corroborate previous recommendations that ongoing parenting education be continued after the finalization of adoptions (Brodzinsky, 2008), (d) reveal many similarities between those reared by one or no birth parents, and (e) illustrate differences in the amounts of adoption-related topic avoidance by adoptees with their mothers and their fathers. The following outline discusses the four research questions, results related to each question, and additional emergent findings.

Research Question 1:
**Do adult adoptees report engaging in adoption-related topic avoidance
 with their adoptive parents?**

Descriptive statistics derived from closed-ended questions revealed that more participants having avoided discussing certain adoption-related topics with their parents than the number who reported never avoiding discussing the topics with their parents. For instance, participants reported that at some level of frequency (*rarely, sometimes, frequently, and always*) they have avoided discussing the predetermined list of adoption-related topics 662 times with their mother and 815 times with their father; but those participants have never avoided discussing the predetermined list of topics 613 times with their mother and 653 times with their father. Thus, the quantitative data demonstrate that participants have more frequently engaged in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents than they have not engaged in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents. These findings warrant further investigation because prior research demonstrated that adopted children reported more reluctance to discuss adoption-related issues

with their parents than what their parents realized (Beckett, Castle, Groothues, Hawkins, Sonuga-Barke, Colvert et al., 2008). Also, the prior research indicated that adoptive parents and adopted children had very different opinions concerning adoptees' difficulties in discussing adoption-related content with their parents. Therefore, findings from the current study and past studies illustrate that family adoption communication processes should be further explored to understand how to best facilitate open communication between adoptive parents and their children.

Consistent with the triangulation design of this study, three open-ended questions also were analyzed to answer research question 1 and provided additional insights into participants' family adoption communication processes. For instance, 50 open-ended responses to the three qualitative questions demonstrated that many participants do not engage in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents. Consequently, the qualitative data substantiated findings derived from the quantitative data; moreover, data derived from this study presents clear evidence that a little more than one-half of these participants have engaged in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents and less than one-half have not engaged in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents.

The next three research questions and additional findings provide greater detail about the complex phenomena of adoption-related (a) communication, (b) topic avoidance, (c) gender differences, and (d) experiences, thoughts, and opinions from the perspectives of adopted adult college students.

Research Question 2:

If adoption-related topic avoidance occurs within adoptive families, what are the major themes of adoption-related topics that are avoided by adoptees with their adoptive parents?

Because data derived from research question 1 indicated that topic avoidance does occur between these participants and their parents, qualitative and quantitative data were examined to

determine the major themes of adoption-related topics that adoptees avoid discussing with their parents. Participants' responses to four open-ended questions demonstrated four themes and 14 subthemes of adoption-related topics that adoptees avoided discussing with their parents.

Participants' open-ended comments also illustrate that many participants do not engage in topic avoidance with their parents, which is reflected in the final theme and its subthemes.

Quantitative data also substantiate a majority of the emergent themes and subthemes. For instance, the results demonstrated numerous adoption-related topics that a majority of these adopted college students have avoided discussing with their parents. It is noteworthy that five subthemes not explored by closed-ended survey questions emerged as additional adoption-related topics that adoptees avoided discussing with their parents. Thus, future utilization of this instrument should include topic avoidance questions inquiring about adoptees' communications with their parents in these five subtheme areas: (a) why adoptees' parents chose adoption as an option to build their family, (b) why adoptees' parents chose them, (c) whether or not adoptees' parents' decisions to adopt was related to infertility problems, (d) why adoptees' parents chose a specific country from which to adopt, and (e) why adoptees' birth parents made an adoption plan for them. The entire list of major themes and subthemes of topics that adoptees avoided discussing with their parents is beneficial for adoptive parents to know, understand, and discuss regularly with their adopted children. Finally, information gleaned from the last theme (adoptees do not engage in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents) and its subthemes (adoptees report having open communication with their parents, adoptees have already asked all of the questions they wanted answered, and adoptees do not have any questions) provided in-depth responses as to why adoptees do not engage in adoption-related topic avoidance with their

parents. These data may aid adoptive parents, those who work with adoptive families, and adoptees to decrease adoption-related topic avoidance between adoptees and their parents.

Research Question 3:

If adoption-related topic avoidance occurs within adoptive families, what are the major themes of reasons that adoption-related topics are avoided by adoptees with their adoptive parents?

The emergent themes and subthemes of reasons why adoptees avoid discussing adoption-related topics with their parents were derived solely from the qualitative data. To quantify the major themes of reasons adoptees avoid adoption-related topics with their parents, the closed-ended survey questions also probed many, but not all, of the topics that emerged from participants' open-ended responses. Hence, data derived from the qualitative data offered more detail and more reasons concerning adoptees' topic avoidance with their parents. Participants' written comments show that many have not initiated certain adoption-related subjects out of fear of hurting or upsetting their parents or out of fear that their parents would misconstrue their questions as inconsiderate or disloyal. In addition, adoptees expressed barriers to discussing adoption-related information with their parents, such as adoptees' (a) lack of resources, (b) perceived inability for either adoptees or their parents to obtain information, and (c) fear of what they would discover. Furthermore, participants explained that they do not want to ask questions because (a) the information is not that important, (b) it has never been the "right time," and (c) their life is good so there is not any need to ask the questions. These reasons that have prohibited some participants from discussing adoption-related issues with their parents appear to be new reasons for further exploration in topic avoidance research, and they may be applicable to other relationship types.

In sum, these additional subthemes offer a more comprehensive list of reasons adoptees engage in adoption-related topic avoidance with their parents than what was explored solely by

the closed-ended survey questions. Also, as we begin to understand the reasons for topic avoidance in adoptive families, family adoption communication processes can be enhanced by further exploring methods to decrease topic avoidance. In addition, participants explained that they are happy without knowing certain adoption-related information; this notion of not wanting additional information could be another area for future topic avoidance research.

Research Question 4:

What, if any, adoption-related topic avoidance gender differences are evident between adopted females and adopted males with their adoptive mothers and adoptive fathers?

In order to answer research question 4, a MANOVA of male and female participants' responses to closed-ended survey questions concerning adoptees' topic avoidance with their mothers and their fathers elicited noteworthy findings. The MANOVA showed only slightly significant differences between adoptees' adoption-related topic avoidance with their adoptive mothers (dependent variable) and with their adoptive fathers (dependent variable). Specifically, sons' and daughters' adoption-related topic avoidance was higher with their fathers than with their mothers. Conversely, no differences emerged between the amounts of topic avoidance that both males and females displayed with either of their parents. In other words, male adoptees' and female adoptees' topic avoidance with their parents were not significantly different. Of noteworthy importance is that these findings are discrepant from what the literature would suggest; the majority of communication research indicates that males engage in more topic avoidance than females (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995a). In addition, previous communication literature documents that mothers typically communicate more with their teens than do fathers (Baldwin & Baranoski, 1990; Nolin & Petersen, 1992) and that mothers are typically more involved in their children's lives than are fathers (Harris & Ryan, 2004).

On the other hand, the present research results correspond with findings from a topic avoidance study conducted with teens and stepparents (Golish & Caughlin, 2002), which reported no differences between the topic avoidance engaged in by teen females and teen males with their mothers and fathers. Results from the current investigation are encouraging because they indicate these adoptees only engaged in slight differences in their conversations with their mothers when compared to their conversations with their fathers. Thus, subsequent topic avoidance research should examine whether or not these marginally significant differences are generalizable to other adoptive families.

Because this examination employed a triangulation design, the qualitative data offered more detail into differences between participants' topic avoidance with their mothers and their fathers. For instance, three subthemes emerged from participants' written comments to open-ended survey questions, which illustrate differences that emerged between adoptees' different communication issues with their father, when compared to their mother. Specifically, adoptees indicated they (a) want to know more about their father's emotional commitment to their adoption, (b) would like to discuss their father's relationship with them, and (c) have different communication issues with their fathers when compared to their mothers.

Additional Findings

Because this research examined participants' experiences and opinions via qualitative and quantitative data, additional findings were presented to expand our understanding of adoption, family adoption communication processes, and topic avoidance. Thus, major emergent themes derived from participants' written comments and responses to closed-ended survey questions were also categorized and reported to enhance current adoption literature.

The following emergent findings should be further addressed via research and implications, because many participants:

1. Relayed gratitude to their birth parents, to their adoptive parents, for the option of adoption, and for conducting this study.
2. Expressed the necessity for parents to engage in early, open, honest, age-appropriate conversations. Many adoptees also provided advice concerning how, what, and when to discuss adoption-related issues. These comments suggested that adoption-related conversations should occur across the family life cycle and that not adhering to the recommendations may impact adoptees' development.
3. Felt it was important for parents to understand that it may be difficult or awkward for adopted children to talk to their parents about adoption-related issues, but it is "normal" for adoptees to be curious about their adoption and biologically-related family members.
4. Said that parents should not be offended if their adopted child asks them questions. In fact, participants encouraged parents to be amenable to answering adoption-related questions and to initiate these discussions across the family's life course.
5. Recommended that parents relay positive messages about adoption to their children.
6. Shared positive adoption-related experiences, opinions, and parent-child communications.

Based on the multitude of quantitative and qualitative findings that answered the four research questions and provided supplemental findings, it is apparent that this study was greatly enhanced by using two types of methodologies to collect data. Specifically, it demonstrates that employing a mixed methodology (a) is useful in exploring a wide range of issues, (b) fills gaps in

understanding the quantitative data, and (c) offers more data by simultaneously exploring participants' experiences via these two modes of data collection. In sum, this study extends current literature concerning family communication, adoption, family adoption communication, and differences in adoptees' topic avoidance with their mothers and their fathers. It also demonstrates the necessity for additional studies to explore families who rear children with fewer than two birth parents.

Limitations

These results should be considered in light of several limitations. The first six limitations listed below indicate that these results may not be representative of all adult adoptees or of all adopted adult college students. Additionally, these six limitations may reduce the study's transferability to different family structures with varying ethnicities, ages, education levels, and other variables, because the scope of this study was confined to a specific population of young adults enrolled at a midwestern university.

1. A response rate for this survey could not be calculated because it is impossible to determine the exact number of adopted adult college students at this midwestern university.
2. Non-response errors may have resulted from certain types of target population members failing to respond (undercoverage), such as adopted college students who had negative adoption-related experiences or who chose not to answer this adoption questionnaire due to topic sensitivity.
3. Coverage errors (some members of the target population who are not included in the frame) may have resulted from adopted college students who were not contacted, such as those who do not use e-mail, do not have internet access, fail to check their e-

mail, or whose e-mail address was inaccurate at the time the survey was disseminated (Couper, 2000).

4. The long period of time that was requested of adoptees to remember (over their lifetime) and report on topics they avoided discussing with their adoptive parent(s) may have created a greater demand on their memory of situations, resulting in inaccurate reports of topic avoidance. Additionally, participants may not be cognizant that they ever avoided a particular adoption-related discussion with their parent(s) when in fact, they had avoided it.
5. Response errors such as duplication and ineligible units may have been recorded. For instance, duplication might have occurred if individuals responded to the survey more than one time. However, this most likely did not occur because participants who supplied their email addresses for the lottery incentive were not re-contacted for the second wave of data collection. Likewise, ineligible units might have also been sampled if non-adopted individuals completed the survey; this most likely did not occur because the initial survey questions should have filtered out ineligible units.
6. Adopted college students from this midwestern university may have had different family adoption communication experiences when compared to adopted college students enrolled at universities outside of the Midwest.
7. Two closed-ended survey questions elicited responses that revealed participants' misunderstanding of the wording, specifically, those questions adoptees would like to ask their adoptive parents. For instance, some participants' answers revealed that the questions were misread or misinterpreted as questions they would like to ask their biologically-related parents. Therefore, future utilization of this survey should include

changing the survey verbiage to be more understandable in order to elicit answers representative of the intended questions.

8. The research design could have been enhanced by surveying a larger number of adult adoptees, such as those at other universities or colleges, or by including additional modes of inquiry, such as conducting focus groups or face-to-face interviews of some participants to gain broader, more in-depth perspectives from adult adoptees.

Implications

Despite the limitations referenced above, these findings have numerous practical implications. With families in the US becoming increasingly diverse, this investigation demonstrates the need for a much broader field of study. Specifically, this research uncovered adopted adults' perceptions, experiences, and opinions of adoption and family adoption communication processes, which can be applied across many disciplines by utilizing the following implications.

1. These results revealed vast similarities between adoptees' experiences, regardless of their adoption type, age, or relationship with their parents. Participants' perspectives offer key insights for practitioners, scholars, and policymakers regarding families joined through foster care, domestic, transnational, and kinship adoptions; stepparent and blended relationships; grandparents rearing grandchildren; and families formed through assisted reproductive technologies.
2. This research also makes significant contributions that acknowledge similarities between individuals reared by at least one person who is not a birth parent, such as (a) their desires for ongoing, updated family medical histories, (b) their recommendations for proactive, ongoing, positive, adult-directed, parent-child adoption-related

- conversations, and (c) the occurrence of adoption-related topic avoidance within the various types of adoptive families. Hence, these implications can be used to inform the creation of guidelines and methods for stimulating ongoing parent-child communications and thereby decreasing adoptees' topic avoidance with their parents.
3. This investigation examined the underexplored phenomena of topic avoidance and reasons for topic avoidance within adoptive families, which suggest that topic avoidance should be added to the Family Adoption Communication conceptual model (Wrobel et al., 2003). Specific details concerning this implication are outlined in Appendix G and the future research section of this paper.
 4. This study illustrated how topic avoidance may affect adoptive families' communication processes and adoptees' adoption-related experiences. This new information begins to inform adoptive parents, adoption educators, and those who work with adoptive families about how to best facilitate ongoing adoption-related conversations with their adopted children.
 5. These findings demonstrates the need for policy modifications to increase ongoing pre-and post-adoption services to families, because ongoing education and support are known to facilitate better adjustment outcomes, stability, and long-term well-being of all families (Carter & Kahn, 1996) and adoptive family members (Atkinson & Gonet, 2007; Barth & Miller, 2000; Brodzinsky, 2006). For instance, researchers, educators, and agencies may be able to develop more comprehensive, ongoing training materials for all members of the adoption triad to be used consistently across the world, such as support, networking, mentoring, and counseling (Atkinson & Gonet, 2007). The majority of adopted adult participants relayed positive adoption-

- related experiences; however, an in-depth analysis revealed opportunities for adoptive parents to increase their families' adoption-related communications and decrease their parent-child adoption-related topic avoidance across the life cycle.
6. These results offer key insights into adoption-related individual and developmental issues that occur across the family life cycle, such as adult adoptees (a) feeling “too old” to discuss adoption-related issues with their parents, (b) wishing for more open adoption-related parent-child communications about birth family members, such as searching for members and for obtaining medical information, and (c) emphatically expressing the importance of adoptive parents initiating adoption-related conversations with adoptees throughout their lifetimes. These implications are also echoed by other researchers, but are clearly in their infancy of development (Brodzinsky, 2008).
 7. The current sample of young adults may provide additional knowledge about developmental milestones consistent with emerging adulthood (Arnett, 1997, 1998), such as greater concerns for their own health and genetics, which may be normative development for all young adults.
 8. After a thorough review of adoption literature, it appears the current study is one of only a few adoption-related studies to explore adopted college students' experiences via an online, web-based survey. Thus, this innovative methodological approach may serve as another tool for researchers to survey a large number of individuals, especially emerging adults, concerning various aspects of this and other complex phenomena.

9. Standardized adoption forms (national and international) should be created and completed by birth parents at the time of the adoption. In fact, one participant's comment echoed this practical application:

The first step is to actually have the facts. Collect as much information about the biological family as possible during the adoption process including ancestry, medical history, reason for choosing adoption, names, and if possible take photos. Then share this with the adopted child as soon as they are old enough to understand, preferably while they are still in elementary school.

10. Due to the curiosities that many adoptees expressed concerning their birth family members, birth parents should be encouraged to provide the following to adoptive parents via standardized adoption forms, immediately following the adoption finalization (a) photos of birth family members, (b) an explanation of why an adoption plan was made, and (c) important facts about the families' histories especially related to medical history.
11. Based on the awkwardness many adult participants relayed about parent-child adoption-related dialogues, it would be reasonable to incorporate participants' advice into adoptive parenting education and instruct adoptive parents to "keep good records" and to, "Write everything down, that way you will not have to verbally communicate."
12. It is imperative that the US develop and implement a national clearinghouse that tracks, monitors, and reports statistics concerning all types of adoptions; such a system would add to the existing international and foster care adoption clearinghouses that already collect data and would provide a mechanism by which to gather and supply ongoing medical information to members of the adoption triad without breaching confidentiality.

13. Data derived from phase 1 (Baltimore, 2007) and the present study demonstrate the need for developing and implementing (a) new policies that aid adoptees in obtaining ongoing, updated, biologically-related family members' genetic health histories and records (Baltimore & Crase, 2010), (b) federal programs to promote preventive health care for individuals who have been separated from a biologically-related family member, and (c) confidential, interstate, and international mutual health registries for participation by all members of the adoption triad, which would most likely require federal oversight. Despite technological advances in electronic medical records, interstate and international medical registries do not exist. Currently, only *voluntary*, *mutual* consent intrastate registries are available, and few people use them. A small number of states offer mutual, voluntary registries that allow biological family members to share ongoing medical information with their biological offspring who have been adopted, while other states have enacted laws that allow adoptive parents to request that a third party contact birth parents only when supplemental health information is medically necessary. However, based on participants' comments, these methods for obtaining medical or genetic health information are not working or are not being utilized. For instance, many participants who were raised by one biologically-related parent (typically their mother) and one adoptive parent (typically their stepfather) also expressed concerns about not being able to access to medical and genetic information. Hence, the proposed, interstate and international standardized adoption forms and medical history registries may reduce the number of adoptees who search for biologically-related family members, since many participants reported that their desires to search for biologically-related family members were

solely for the purposes of obtaining medical information. Additionally, because knowing one's genetic health history is a preventative factor in diagnosing and treating medical conditions, this implication is also supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Family History Public Health Initiative (CDC, 2007). The CDC recommends that all individuals know and report their genetic health history to their medical practitioners for preventative care.

14. Because adoption-related experiences were reported favorably by all adoptive parents in phase 1 (Baltimore, 2007), by a majority of adoptive parents in the *NSAP*, and by an overwhelming majority of adoptees in the present study, adoption should be promoted more heavily to facilitate adoptions of children into families.

In conclusion, results from the current investigation should aid adoptive families, adoption workers, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners. More important, these implications should enhance the health and well-being of adoptees and their families, while providing a foundation from which to inform future research on this and related topics.

Future Research

Due to the lack of research literature on adoption, topic avoidance, and family adoption communication processes, numerous recommendations for future research emerged from the present study. First and foremost, these results make a unique contribution to current literature by demonstrating similarities between and within adopted adults' communication processes, regardless of the adoption type. It also fills gaps in topic avoidance literature by examining this construct within adoptive families. Additionally, the study elucidates similarities between and within adopted adults' and adoptive parents' beliefs that adoption is a positive experience for many individuals. Thus, the similarities that emerged between and within these family structures,

and their members, reveal the necessity for supplemental studies to investigate all types of adoptive families across their life cycles. Thus, future directions for research should examine:

1. How all members of the adoption triad are affected by communication processes over their lifetimes, because previous family adoption communication research shows that adoption-related communication is an ongoing process that evolves across the family's life course (Wrobel, Kohler, et al., 2003). However, researchers have not yet begun to fully understand these processes.
2. The reasons why emerging adults avoid discussing certain adoption-related topics with their parents. For instance, these findings revealed that barriers to (a) open communication, (b) resources, and (c) adoption-related information, (d) adoptees' fear of the unknown, (e) adoptees' respect for their parents' feelings, and (f) adoptees' ambivalence toward obtaining such information at this point in their lives detract many emerging adult adoptees from initiating adoption-related conversations with their parents. Hence, these may be new reasons for topic avoidance that generalize to other family structures, other types of relationships, and other adoptees, particularly of different age groups.
3. What, if any, purpose adoption-related topic avoidance serves within adoptive families? For instance, communication privacy boundaries and topic avoidance between adoptees (especially emerging adults) and their adoptive parents serve adaptive purposes for adoptees or their family members. Thus, there may be risks or benefits associated with encouraging adoptees to assert their boundaries with their parents or by encouraging parents to discuss topics their adopted children are not ready to discuss.

4. Parenting education strategies that promote adoptive parents' communication of respect to adoptees concerning adoption, birth family members, adoption-related curiosities, and desires to search for additional information in order to stimulate well-formed communication boundaries such as healthy cohesion and flexibility within adoptive families. These initiatives may also enhance adoptive family members' resiliencies.
5. How adoptive parents' knowledge of, understanding of, and respect for adoptees' curiosities and desires to know their birth family information can be enhanced to increase overall family well-being.
6. How adoptive families' communication, respect, and boundaries affect the overall well-being of family members.
7. How to foster parent-child adoption-related communications across the lifespan of adoptive families.
7. The frequency, reasons, and additional topics of adoption-related topic avoidance occurrences between adoptees and their parents.
9. Revising the FAC model and its processes (Wrobel et al., 2003). For instance, data from phase 1 (Baltimore, 2007) and the current study revealed that key emotional components (e.g., additional actions taken by adopted children during phases II and III and curiosities children do not communicate to their parents) should most likely be added to the FAC model. Therefore, preliminary, proposed changes to the existing model are illustrated in Appendix G to inform future work.
10. Participants' recommendations for enhanced parent-child communications to supplement current literature concerning best practice approaches for adoptive

- parenting education, such as adoptive parents divulging the majority of known information to adoptees, by the time adoptees reach adulthood.
11. Effective methods for promoting adoption to prospective birth parents and adoptive parents.
 12. Whether or not gathering medical, genetic, and additional information from birth parents (via the proposed, standardized forms) at the time of the adoption reduces adoptees' curiosities and desires to search for birth family members.
 13. The possibility of conducting focus groups, in-depth interviews, and longitudinal studies, or sampling larger populations of adult adoptees to gather data concerning the discrepant cases and under-represented adoption types, such as those formed through ART, surrogacy, and same-sex couples.
 14. Methods for increasing adopted individuals' abilities to retrieve or obtain adoption-related information (e.g., genetic health histories, biologically-related family members' non-identifying information) from various sources (e.g., adoption agencies, state departments). For instance, explore the viability of developing electronic medical records databases that can create a forum for exchanging ongoing, non-identifying, updated medical information with all members of the adoption triad, or at least with members' health care providers.
 15. Further uses of web-based survey instruments to explore others' opinions and experiences regarding potentially sensitive topics, such as adoption. This newer method of data collection appears beneficial for today's consumer, especially emerging adults and college students. Thus, family scientists should continually improve upon this methodology via future studies.

The following recommendations should be implemented for future research that utilizes the ATAQ instrument (Baltimore, 2009):

1. The development and utilization of new survey questions to make this instrument's questions more clear, such as clarifying the distinction between biologically-related and adoptive parents. This could be achieved by adding parent groups (e.g., biologically-related parents) to the questions. Data derived from the revised questions may also provide insights into questions and answers adoptees would like contained within standardized adoption forms, which may alleviate many of their curiosities.
2. The feasibility of using different prompts and/or frequency scales in the current survey to improve adoptees' retrieval and recall in order to answer questions related to topic avoidance over their lifetime, thus minimizing reporting biases due to forgetfulness.
3. The utility of more specific questions pertinent to each type of adoption. For example, based on one participant's statement, different questions should be added to adequately represent adoption-related issues specific to the various types of adoptive families; here are her recommendations, "I'd look at different questions if the adoption was from a different country. There can be many more questions if the child was adopted in another part of the world what was that part of the world like, social status, culture differences, likely family backgrounds, etc."
5. Adding other questions to more fully investigate communication gender differences among adoptees and their parents.

In sum, results derived from this study provide future directions for research, which will continue to inform strategies used by adoption workers, educators, policymakers, researchers, and to continue to enhance the overall well-being of adoptive families.

Conclusion

Because communication is an integral, crucial component of all relationships (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002), and because researchers have not yet begun to understand the multitude of complexities of family communication, more research must be conducted to better understand communication among all family types and *especially those of adoptive families*. In addition, because the number of children who are being reared by at least one individual who is not a birth parent continues to increase, future studies must be conducted to explore methods for improving the well-being of all individuals involved in this family type. Certainly, the quantitative data derived from this research provides new insights into adoption-related topic avoidance and family adoption communication processes. Also, the open-ended components of the survey elicited many participants' comments which contribute a vast amount of information to the understanding of adopted college students' adoption-related topic avoidance and reasons for topic avoidance with their parents.

The following comments from participants stress the importance of healthy parent-child communication and its effect on an adoptee's well-being:

My parents began talking with me about my adoption ever since I can remember. We've always had open communication about it. I feel that this has helped keep my relationship with my parents very close. I was never afraid to ask them any questions related to my adoption or my biological family.

...Communication in general is the key. If you have overall great (positive) communication, then generally you will have a closer and more open relationship. Thus, allowing the child to feel comfortable in asking those sometimes hard and intimidating questions.

Open communication lines both ways from the adoptive parents to the child is the key.

Be open and forthcoming. It will help better the "adopted" relationship.

Despite the fact that open communication between parents and their children is recommended by researchers, scholars, and practitioners, topic avoidance among emerging adults may be normal. Some researchers have found that relationship satisfaction increases between parents and their child when parents respect their child's desire for privacy (Petronio, 1994). However, there remains much to be discovered regarding the reasons adoptees do not discuss adoption-related topics with their adoptive parents or what effects topic avoidance has on the well-being of families.

In conclusion, the present study makes significant contributions to the existing literature by illuminating the importance of additional research endeavors that explore children who are reared by fewer than two birth parents. Finally, consistent with the life course perspective (Elder, George, & Shanahan, 1996), this research gives credence to the notion that adoption, communication, family adoption communication processes, and topic avoidance are lifelong processes that require further examination for the well-being of the families and children who experience adoption.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The survey was accessed from <http://humansciences.isusas.sgizmo.com>

Iowa State University Adoption Survey

Informed Consent

Title of Study: Iowa State University Adoption Survey
Principal Investigator: Diana L. Baltimore

You are being asked to complete a survey for the purpose of understanding communication processes and opinions of adopted adults who currently attend Iowa State University. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire that asks for your opinions and experiences concerning your adoption. The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential—it will be coded electronically and will be kept on a secure, password protected computer. You may voluntarily provide your e-mail address at the end of the survey to be entered into a random drawing for a chance to win one of eight \$25 gift cards. These individuals' names will remain confidential and known only to the primary researcher for the purposes of disseminating the awards. All records, including e-mail addresses, will be destroyed after the study is completed. All data will be reported without any identifying information. It will take approximately 10-25 minutes to complete the survey. The amount of time to complete the survey will vary between participants. This research will benefit society, other adopted individuals, adoptive families, and adoptive parents by educating others about your experiences, thoughts, and opinions concerning adoption. Some participants may experience mild emotional discomfort when thinking about or responding to adoption-related questions. There are no other foreseeable risks or benefits for any person who completes this survey.

You may, at any time, stop completing the survey, revoke participation after completing the survey, and/or refrain from answering any or all questions without any penalty or negative consequences. Should you withdraw, your data will be eliminated from the study and will be destroyed. If you have any questions, or would like to receive a summary of the findings, please email the primary researcher at: dianab1@iastate.edu. If you have any additional concerns you may also contact Dr. Sedahlia Jasper Crase at sedahlia@iastate.edu. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, Office for Responsible Research, (515) 294-3115, 1138 Pearson Hall, Ames, IA 50011.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY ADOPTION SURVEY

By clicking on the "Continue" button of this online survey, you are consenting that you have read, understood, and agree to participate in this survey. Only individuals who provide consent may complete this survey.

I have read and understand this form and consent to my participation. *

☐ No

☒ Yes

Only adopted individuals are being asked to complete this survey because the questions relate directly to adoption-related experiences.

Were you adopted? *

☐ No

☐ Yes

Iowa State University Adoption Survey

How old are you? (years):

How old were you when you were legally adopted?
years:

months:

How old were you when you found out you were adopted?
years:

months:

How would you classify your adoption type?

- ☐ Domestic (adopted within the U.S. through a private agency or attorney, not from foster care)
- ☐ Transnational (adoption of a child who is a citizen of one country by adoptive parents who are citizens of a different country)
- ☐ Foster care (adopted from foster care)
- ☐ Stepparent (legal adoption by a parent who lives with one of the child's biologically-related parents).
- ☐ Other. Please specify:

Which level of openness describes the overall amount of contact you had with any member of your birth family before your eighteenth birthday?

- ☐ Closed (absolutely no contact between you, or your adoptive parents, with any member of your birth family)
- ☐ Open (at least yearly contact between you and at least one member of your birth family).
- ☐ Semi open (all contact between birth family members and adoptive family members is handled by a third party, such as an adoption agency or an attorney).
- ☐ Other. Please specify:

Please choose the response that best represents your opinion of each statement. There are no right or wrong answers.

	Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Generally agree	Completely agree	No opinion
In general, the media coverage of adoption portrays adoption in a very favorable manner.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think my life is better because I was adopted as opposed to being raised by a member of my birth family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would recommend adoption to others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would recommend placing a child for adoption to a parent who is uncertain about raising a child.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Placing a child for adoption is a good option for birth families that cannot raise, afford, or care for a child.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A birth family who places a child for adoption is looking out for the child's best interest.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
More birth parents should be educated or given choices about how to place their child for adoption.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What are your opinions about adoption?

What are your opinions about birth parents placing children for adoption?

Please add any additional comments, opinions, or thoughts that you may have regarding adoption.

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Iowa State University Adoption Survey

Which of the following describes the type of family into which you were adopted?

☐ Two-parent married

☐ Single parent

☐ Stepparent family

☐ Other. Please specify:

Please recall how frequently, if ever, you avoided talking about the following topics with your **adoptive mother** over your entire lifetime.

When determining if you ever “avoided” a topic, we want you to include any time you ever:

- wanted to discuss the topic, but didn’t
- had a question regarding a topic but didn’t ask it
- had a thought but didn’t talk about it; etc.

With my adoptive mother, through my entire lifetime, I have avoided discussing ...

If you could ask your adoptive mother one question about your adoption, what would that question be?

[illegible]

Please recall how frequently, if ever, you avoided talking about the following topics with your **adoptive father** over your entire lifetime.

When determining if you ever “avoided” a topic, we want you to include any time you ever:

- wanted to discuss the topic, but didn't
- had a question regarding a topic but didn't ask it
- had a thought but didn't talk about it; etc.

With my adoptive father, through my entire lifetime, I have avoided discussing...

[illegible]

	Never avoided	Rarely avoided	Sometimes avoided	Frequently avoided	Always avoided	I never had an adoptive father	Not applicable
my interests in searching for any one member of my birth family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
my interests in contacting the adoption agency or attorney who finalized my adoption	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
whether or not I have biologically-related brothers or sisters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If you could ask your adoptive father one question about your adoption, what would that question be?

Iowa State University Adoption Survey

Please choose the response that best represents your opinion of each statement. There are no right or wrong answers.

I still have unanswered questions regarding . . .

	Yes	No
my adoption	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
why I was placed for adoption	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
my medical history	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
if my (adoptive) parents know where my biological parent(s) live	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Yes	No
any member of my birth family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
searching for any member of my birth family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
meeting any member of my birth family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
the attorney or agency that finalized my adoption	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
whether I have biologically-related brothers or sisters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please specify all other unanswered questions you still have.

How could you get answers to questions you currently have concerning your adoption?

What are all of the reasons you do not have answers to these adoption-related questions?

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Reasons for not discussing adoption-related issues with either of your parents:

Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with how well each of the following reasons explain why you ever, even once, avoided discussing at least one question about your adoption with either one of your adoptive parents, at any point throughout your entire lifetime.

I have not talked about at least one of these issues (your medical information, searching for any member of your birth family, contacting the adoption agency or attorney who finalized your adoption, etc.), because . . .

	Completely disagree	Generally disagree	Generally agree	Completely agree	Not applicable
It is emotionally difficult for me to talk to my adoptive mother or father about this issue.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
At least one of my parents may have thought of me in a negative way for asking.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I didn't want to change the nature of my relationship with either one of my adoptive parents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I didn't want to hurt at least one of my adoptive parents' feelings.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wasn't sure if at least one of my parents would have responded to my question.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It would have been inappropriate to talk about it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't like talking about my adoption-related issues with at least one of my adoptive parents because those are thoughts I like to keep to myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I asked questions in the past, it resulted in emotionally painful discussions for either me or at least one of my adoptive parents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I did not feel emotionally close enough to at least one of my adoptive parents to ask.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted to avoid conflict with at least one of my adoptive parents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What advice would you give adoptive parents about how to best communicate adoption-related facts with their adopted children (what and how much information, how frequently, at what age, etc.)?

What, if anything, would you change about your adoption-related communications with either of your adoptive parents?

Please add any additional comments, opinions, questions, or thoughts you have about parent-child communications concerning adoption.

If applicable, please describe at least one adoption-related issue or question you wanted to discuss with either of your adoptive parents but chose not to do so.

If applicable, please explain why you did not discuss the above issue(s) with your parent(s).

What is your gender?

☐ male

☐ female

What is your ethnicity?

☐ Caucasian

☐ African American

☐ Hispanic American

☐ Asian

☐ Native American

☐ Middle Eastern

☐ Other. Please specify:

What is the highest educational level that you have completed?

☐ Less than 1 year of college

☐ 1-2 years of college

☐ More than 2 years of college

☐ Bachelor's degree

☐ Some graduate coursework

☐ Master's degree

☐ Some doctoral coursework

☐ Ph.D.

☐ M.D.

☐ Other. Please specify:

What is your current marital status?

☐ Single, never been married

☐ Cohabiting with a partner

☐ Married

☐ Divorced

☐ Married but legally separated from spouse

☐ Widowed

☐ Other. Please specify:

How many children do you have?

How many of your children are adopted?

Would you consider adopting a child in the future?

☐ No

☐ Maybe

☐ Yes

If you know other adopted adult(s) who may be interested in completing this survey, please feel free to provide their e-mail addresses so that I may contact them to participate in another study.

There may be a second stage to this project that would involve either phone interviews or additional surveys of a small number of adopted adults. Would you like to be considered for selection in the second project? You will not be obligated to continue in the second stage if you give me permission to contact you.

☐ No

☐ Yes. Enter ISU email:

Your opinions and experiences are very important to enhancing others' understanding of adoption. Please provide your additional comments, thoughts, or opinions below.

OPTIONAL: If you would like to be entered into a random drawing for a chance to win one of eight \$25 gift cards, please provide your Iowa State University e-mail address. Winners will be notified within the next 6 weeks, via e-mail.

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey!

Your opinions will help educate others about adoption.

LAST PAGE: Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX B: E-MAIL CORRESPONDENCE

First e-mail Correspondence

Subject line of e-mail: Were you adopted?

If you are adopted, I need your help completing a quick questionnaire located at <http://humansciences.isusas.sgizmo.com>. I am adopted, I have one adopted daughter, and I look forward to learning about your experiences.

I am conducting this questionnaire for my research as a Ph.D. student in Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State University. **In exchange for your time, your name will be entered into a drawing to receive one of eight \$25 gift cards—the time to complete the questionnaire will vary, depending on each individual person's desire to share information.** You may click on the hyperlink at any time to complete the questionnaire. Thanks for your help!!

~Diana Baltimore, Ph.D. Student
Department of Human Development and Family Studies
Iowa State University

Second e-mail Correspondence

Subject line of e-mail: Are you adopted?

If you are adopted, I need your help completing a quick questionnaire located at <http://humansciences.isusas.sgizmo.com>. I am adopted, I have one adopted daughter and I am eager to learn about your experiences.

I am conducting this survey for my research as a Ph.D. student in Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State University. I need opinions, input, and thoughts from adopted adults so I can help educate other family science researchers about adoption. In exchange for your time, **your name will be entered into a drawing to receive one of eight \$25 gift cards**—just for taking time to complete a questionnaire about your adoption-related communications and opinions. Thank you for voluntarily agreeing to complete this survey. You may click on the link at any time to complete the questionnaire.

~Diana Baltimore, M.S., Ph.D. student
Department of Human Development and Family Studies
Iowa State University

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE OPEN-CODING OF PARTICIPANTS' COMMENTS

If you could ask your adoptive mother one question about your adoption, what would that question be?

For adoptive mother:

%=No questions (This is often accompanied by a statement that the relationship was good and open.)

#=Thanks

@=Why did you adopt / Why did you pick me?

**=Is it okay/how to find my biological mother?

Questions about biological mother

++=Question about birth mother, birth father, siblings

!!=Medical history

Open Text Responses:

My mother is very jealous of my birth mother because of the one experience that i had with her: she gave birth to me. I naturally have questions concerning where I've come from but my mother gets quite upset when i bring up these questions. If i could ask her one, **=i would ask her how she would feel if I looked for my birth parents, which is something I plan to do.

@=Why did you want to adopt?

To be honest, I have no idea. I've never really spent a lot of time thinking about my adoption. I accepted that I am adopted, at the time I asked any questions I had, and accepted that there really isn't any information that my parents have about my birth parents. Of course I could go to the adoption agency and do some research, but %=I'm quite content with the knowledge I have, or lack thereof. I don't feel that finding any of that information out would help me or that of my birth parents. I also feel, that even if I were to find out and even meet my birth mother it wouldn't mean a whole lot. I mean, sure she gave birth to me, and that's a pretty big deal, but the influence she has had on my life since, and in shaping who I actually am, is minimal to none.

Why did you not learn from your mistakes the first time that you continued to lead a life not only damaging to yourself but also an irresponsible number of children that they had to be removed from you?

@=Why did you do it?

If you could go back to the day you decided to give me up for adoption, would you change your decision?

she doesn't exist and shouldn't exist to adoptees other than being the gene pool that half made me

@=Why

Why was I given up for adoption

%=I've asked her all the questions I've had. She's been quite open about my adoption.

++=What does my mother look like?

Well since I did, I asked her why I was given up for adoption and just got to learn about who my birth parents are.

++=I would ask my adoptive mother what her impression was of my birth mother.

%=My parents have been open with me about being adopted since before I knew what adoption meant, so I don't have any questions.

**=What would she think about me finding my birthparents?

#=Thanks for having me!

Why she lied about not knowing who my birthmother was. She's actually already answered that, but I don't believe her answer. :)

@=Why?

I would ask her for my family tree including who my grandparents were as well as !=medical history

For me, I believe that my adoptive mother shared all knowledge she had of the adoption and my adoptive parents. She actually did not know very much, but she gave me a box of letters and gifts and things that my birthparents had sent me over the years. However, I was apprehensive about telling my adoptive parents that I had initiated a search and found my birthparents. I felt that I would have somehow disappointed her or saddened her in some way. After talking about it with her, however, she was fine with it and very supportive.

%=I really don't have any questions that my adoptive mother hasn't answered. I know the how and why parts. I have a lot of questions about my biological family, but my parents really don't know anything about them either as I was in an orphanage. There are a lot of holes in my early history because that's the nature of a lot of foreign adoptions. Am I disappointed that I'm not going to learn about my past, most definitely.

Was there even a name, whether you saw it or not, for my biological father.

What were the circumstances in which you gave me up? Why did you do it?

My parents (adoptive) have always been extremely open with me about adoption and have always answered any questions I have to the best of their knowledge. Because of %=this I have no questions that I've always wondered about.

%=My mother was very open about my adoption so there isn't anything that she knows about my adoption that I do not know.

%=There's nothing I haven't already asked her.

@=Why did you adopt a child when you couldn't be a good mother?

%=I have no unanswered questions.

N/A

N/A

N/A

We discuss it openly - %=there are no questions that have not been asked.

Because my sister and I have different birth fathers, I know that I would not have been born into an ideal situation. !=I would simply ask about my medical history.

@=What made you choose adoption over other options?

@=Why did you decided to adopt me specifically and not other adoptees?

++=Were there other family members to take care of me?

I still have my mother

%=nothing. I've already asked her, and I am in contact with my birth mother and her other children.

We are very open and talk about everything. %=I have no questions as of right now

%=Nothing. #=I would thank her for adopting me.

My adoptive mother are now on great terms with the situation and she was willing to speak with me on anything I wanted to know after finding out I talked with my birth mother.

%=I've asked everything. My family was very open with the fact that I was adopted to the point that I don't ever remember being told, I just always knew that I was adopted.

++=If she knows anything about my birth family.

**=Will you be comfortable with me having a relationship with my biological mother?

**=How would you feel if I wanted to meet my biological mother?

%=I do not have any questions because i consider them my parents. My biological parents are not my parents and I have no want or reason to see them. They are just people out there in the world to me that I don't know. I would ask questions to the nuns in the orphanage though regarding the physical and emotional abuse they put me through.

**=How could I maybe get in contact with my birth parents if they are still alive even?

Do you really see me in the same way that you see your real son?

%=I have asked her everything i need to know. She is very open

Why she chose to have me as a natural birth which resulted in a chronic throat condition that resulted in 75 throat surgeries for me between the ages of 2 and 23

Can you please tell me everything about yourself? I actually did end up finding my birth mom January 2009. :)

I always ask whenever I think of something once I figure out how I want to ask it.

%=I really would have no questions only #=thanks for the life she has provided.

What can I look forward to growing in to?

Probably regarding my birth parents !=medical history.

@=What was the process like?

%=I have do not have unanswered question.

%=None -- my mother is a good and loving mother

%=I've already ask them all.

@=I would simply ask what made you decide? Whatever her reasoning I would still never take a day back for the life I have now.

%=I don't have any questions. My family and I are very open about my adoption. Also, my birth mother very recently has tried to be in contact with me and my adoptive mother has been very understanding.

++=Did you ever see photographs of either of my birth parents?

++=Why would you get pregnant if you couldn't handle it?

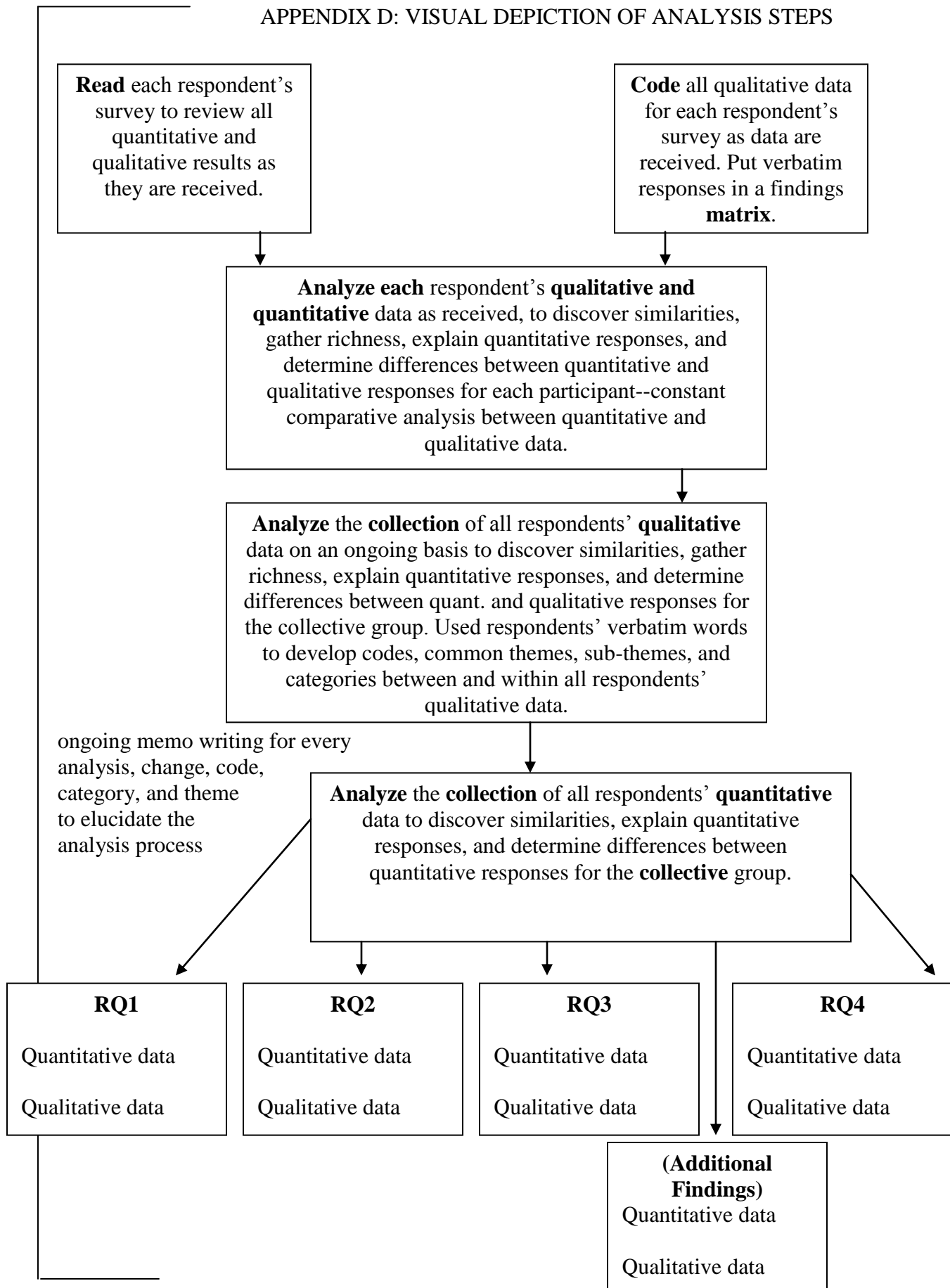
**=When can I go back and find my birth family?

%=I have asked all the questions that I have wanted to.

I was adopted by a single father.

%=I have already asked her any questions that seemed relevant to me.

APPENDIX D: VISUAL DEPICTION OF ANALYSIS STEPS



APPENDIX E: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD MATERIALS

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
 OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

 Institutional Review Board
 Office for Responsible Research
 Vice President for Research
 1138 Pearson Hall
 Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
 515 294-4566
 FAX 515 294-4267

DATE: February 3, 2010

TO: Diana L. Baltimore
521 S. Delaware Street
Boone, IA 50036

CC: Sedahlia Jasper Crase
4380 Palmer, Suite 2361

FROM: Office for Responsible Research

TITLE: Family adoption communication processes: A mixed methods study

IRB ID: 07-352

Approval Date: 2 February 2010

Date for Continuing Review: 9 September 2010

Submission Type: Modification

Review Type: Expedited

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

Your study has been approved according to the dates shown above. To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- **Use only the approved study materials** in your research, including the **recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.**
- **Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes** to the study by submitting the "Continuing Review and/or Modification" form.
- **Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences** involving risks to subjects or others; and **(2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks** to subjects or others.
- **Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses**, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- **Complete a new continuing review form** at least three to four weeks prior to the **date for continuing review** as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Research investigators are expected to comply with the principles of the Belmont Report, and state and federal regulations regarding the involvement of humans in research. These documents are located on the Office for Responsible Research website [www.compliance.iastate.edu] or available by calling (515) 294-4566.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

ORR 09/09

For IRB Use Only	Modification Approval Date <u>February 2, 2010</u>	IRB DEC 2-1 2009
	Continuing Review Approval Date <u>February 2, 2010</u>	
	Approval Expiration Date: <u>September 9, 2010</u>	

ISU HUMAN SUBJECTS CONTINUING REVIEW AND/OR MODIFICATION FORM

TYPE OF SUBMISSION: ☒ Continuing Review ☒ Modification ☒ Continuing Review and Modification

Principal Investigator: Diana L. Baltimore		Phone: 515-432-2732
Degree: B.S., M.S.	Correspondence Address: 521 S Delaware Street, Boone, IA 50036	
Department: Human Development and Family Studies	E-mail Address: dianab1@iastate.edu	
Project Title: Family adoption communication processes: A mixed methods study		
IRB ID: 07-352	Date of Last Continuing Review: first review: Sept. 11, 2007; second review: October, 2008; third review: October, 2009	
IF STUDENT PROJECT		
Name of Major Professor: Sedahlia Jasper Crase		Phone: 515-294-6135
Department: Human Development and Family Studies		Campus Address: 4380 Palmer Ste 2361
E-mail Address: sedahlia@iastate.edu		

FUNDING INFORMATION:

<input type="checkbox"/> External Grant/Contract	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Internal Support (no specific funding source) or Internal Grant (indicate name below)
Name of Funding Source:	OSPA Record ID on Gold Sheet:
<input type="checkbox"/> Part of Training, Center, Program Project Grant – Director:	Overall IRB ID No:
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Student Project—No funding or funding provided by student	

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The proposed project or relationship with the sponsor require the disclosure of significant financial interests that present an actual or potential conflict of interest for investigators involved with this project. By signing this form, all investigators certify that they have read and understand ISU's Conflict of Interest policy as addressed by the ISU Faculty Handbook and made all disclosures required by it. (<http://www.provost.iastate.edu/faculty>)

Do you or any member of your research team have a conflict of interest? ☐ Yes ☒ No
If yes, has the appropriate disclosure form been completed? ☐ Yes ☒ No

ASSURANCE

I certify that the information provided in this application is complete and accurate and consistent with proposal(s) submitted to external funding agencies. I agree to provide proper surveillance of this project to insure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are protected. I will report any adverse reactions to the IRB for review. I agree that modifications to the originally approved project will not take place without prior review and approval by the Institutional Review Board, and that all activities will be performed in accordance with state and federal regulations and the Iowa State University Federal Wide Assurance.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Student Projects: Faculty signature indicates that this application has been reviewed and is recommended for IRB review.

Signature of Supervising Faculty

Date

IRB Approval Signature

Date

For IRB Use Only	EXPEDITED per 45 CFR 46.110(b) _____, Category _____, Letter _____
	STUDY REMAINS EXEMPT per 45 CFR 46.101(b) _____
	WAIVER OF SIGNED CONSENT per 45 CFR 46.117(c) <u>yes</u>
	WAIVER OF ELEMENTS of Consent per 45 CFR 46.116 <u>no</u>
	VULNERABLE POPULATION per 45 CFR 46. <u>409</u>

Please answer each question. If the question does not pertain to this study, please type not applicable (N/A).

SECTION I: KEY PERSONNEL

- ☐ Yes ☒ No Have there been any personnel/staff changes since the last IRB approval was granted?
If yes, complete the following sections (Additions/Deletions) as appropriate.

Add	Delete	Last Name	First Name

List all current members and relevant experiences of the project personnel. This information is intended to inform the committee of the training and background of the investigators and key personnel.

NAME & DEGREE(S)	POSITION AT ISU & ROLE ON PROJECT	TRAINING & DATE OF TRAINING
✓ Diana L. Baltimore, M.S.	Graduate Student; Principal Investigator	IRB training: 05/18/06
✓ Sedahlia Jasper Crase, Ph.D.	Major Professor	IRB training: 09/19/00

SECTION II: CONTINUING REVIEW

In addition to completing Section I: Key Personnel, please complete Section II if this is an application for Continuing Review. If this is an application for continuing review and you will be modifying your project in the future, please complete all sections of the form. **If this application is only to request approval for a modification or change to your study, please complete Section I: Key Personnel and Section III: Proposed Modifications or Changes.**

Part A: Enrollment Status

- ☐ Yes ☒ No Is the research **permanently** closed to the enrollment of new participants?
- ☐ Yes ☒ No Have **all** participants completed all research-related interventions?
- ☒ Yes ☐ No Does research remain active only for long-term follow-up of participants?
- ☐ Yes ☒ No Are the remaining research activities limited to data analysis? OR
- ☐ Yes ☒ No Participant enrollment has not begun and no additional risks have been identified.

Number of Participants Approved by IRB: 90	Number of Participants Consented to Date: 25
Number of Participants Consented Since Last Continuing Review: Total: N/A Males: 0 Females: 0	
Number of Participants Screened: 25	Number of Participants Lost to Follow-up: 0
Check if any enrolled participants are: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Minors (under 18). Age Range of Minors: 7-16 years <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant Women/Fetuses <input type="checkbox"/> Cognitively Impaired <input type="checkbox"/> Prisoners	Check below if this project involves either: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Existing Data/Records <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Secondary Analysis <input type="checkbox"/> Pathology/Diagnostic Specimens
List Estimated Percent of the Total Enrolled That Are Minorities Below	
American Indians: 0	Alaskan Native: 0
Asian or Pacific Islander: 12%	African American: 0
Black (Not of Hispanic Origin): 0	Hispanic: 0

1. ☐ Yes ☒ No Have any participants withdrawn or have you asked any participants to withdraw from the study?

List number for each and reason for withdrawal:

--

Part B: Protocol Summary – Please use the amount of space needed to adequately address the questions.

1. Please provide a concise summary of the purpose and main procedures of the study.

The purpose of the initial study was to interview minor subjects (between the ages of 5 and 14 years of age) who were adopted before 18 months of age, and their parents to:

1. Examine attitudes, opinions, and definitions of the concept of adoption
2. Determine differences in attitudes and opinions related to adoption among adoptees and their parents
3. Gain a greater understanding of societal beliefs surrounding the concept of adoption
4. Determine stigmatizations of the concept of adoption
5. Understand the cognitive levels of understanding for the concept of adoption between 5 and 14 years of age.

The initial stage of this study is completed.

The purpose of the follow-up/continuation is to conduct a longitudinal study, following the same subjects, to possibly arrive at some implications for communicating with, rearing, and counseling adoptees and their families. Also, a quantitative measure has been developed from the initial results to determine transferability of their data to adopted adults.

The purpose of the follow-up/continuation is to conduct a longitudinal study, following the same subjects, to possibly arrive at some implications for communicating with, rearing, and counseling adoptees and their families. The same 16 adults and 9 adopted children (from the initial study) will be interviewed one time, for no more than 80 minutes, using a structured interview guide (attached). Parents will provide written consent for all interview questions prior to agreeing to allow their child(ren) to be interviewed (see attached question consent form for parents). Parents are welcome to be present during their child's interview. Interviews will be conducted face-to-face, audiorecorded and transcribed.

The purposes of the follow-up study are:

1. To examine adoptees' and their parents' attitudes, opinions, and communications about adoption.
2. To determine differences in attitudes and opinions of adoption among adoptees and their parents.
3. To possibly discover implications for communicating with, raising, and counseling adoptees and their families.
4. To understand how families communicate about adoption.

Also, a mixed methods survey, comprised of quantitative and qualitative questions, has been developed from data generated in the initial study (see attached survey, which is located at <http://humansciences.isusas.sgizmo.com>). The web-based survey will be e-mailed to all Iowa State University college students (undergraduate and graduate) who are enrolled during Spring 2010, to determine transferability of findings from the initial study. A list of all undergraduate and graduate students' e-mail addresses will be obtained from the Registrar's office. No more than five e-mail requests will be sent to all I.S.U. college students via their I.S.U. e-mail address; an "opt-out" feature will be implemented to allow individuals who do not wish to be contacted again, to refrain from receiving additional e-mail requests. Only individuals who self-identify themselves as being adopted are asked to participate. The purposes of the survey are to:

1. Determine these participants' self-reported family adoption communication processes.
- 2: Determine, what, if any, adoption-related communication topics have ever been avoided by these participants.

*will be reviewed in
the future.
per 2/2/2010
email
LP*

- 3: Determine whether these participants' unanswered questions can be termed topic avoidance.
 4: Determine whether the Family Adoption Communication model should be updated to include topic avoidance.

Sample e-mail requests are attached. Students who provide an e-mail address will be entered into a drawing to receive one of eight \$25 gift certificates.

These key ethical issues are outlined in the consent form located on the first page of the survey: (a) Risks of participation: "There should not be any risks to any participant who completes this survey." (b) Benefits of participation: "No direct benefits are reasonably expected for any person answering this questionnaire. Possible societal benefits may include implications for counseling, education, and intervention concerning adoption. Participants taking this survey will remain anonymous and all data will be reported without any identifying information." (c) Participants' rights: "Any individual may, at any time, stop completing the survey, revoke their participation after completing the survey, and/or refrain from answering any or all questions." (d) Costs: "There are no costs to any participants." (e) Stipend/remuneration: "A total of eight (8) gift cards worth \$25 each will be randomly awarded as payment or reimbursement to four, randomly chosen participants who complete the survey. These individuals' names will remain confidential and known only to the primary researcher for the purposes of disseminating the awards to each participant." (f) Privacy and confidentiality: "Every effort will be made to be sure that your participation in this survey and all of your responses will remain confidential. However, confidentiality cannot be absolutely guaranteed because some funding and regulatory agencies may have the right to review the records from this study to be sure that certain rules are followed correctly." (g) Contact numbers: "For problems or questions regarding this survey, please contact either Diana Baltimore at dianab1@iastate.edu or at 515-432-2732 or Dr. Sedahlia Jasper Crase at sedahlia@iastate.edu or at 515-294-6135."

All information for both studies will be stored on a password-protected computer; all identifying information will be stored in a locked safe in the primary researcher's home, and no identifying information will be stored in the same location as data.

2. Please provide a summary of how the study is progressing (e.g., progress to date in terms of the overall study plan, success or problems encountered, reasons enrollment has not begun, etc.)

The continuation is being requested to utilize data from the initial study to follow the same participants to determine longitudinal changes since the initial study, which was conducted in 2007. Also, in order to determine transferability of findings, the principal investigator developed a web-based survey utilizing data from the initial study to distribute to all Iowa State University college students to determine generalizability of findings to other adopted individuals.

3. Is there any new information (positive or negative) from this study (e.g., interim analysis) or elsewhere (e.g., current literature) that might affect someone's willingness to enroll or continue in the study? It is especially important for the investigator to notify the IRB of literature or information that's relevant to the risks to participants in the study.

No

4. Please provide a summary of amendments or modifications since last IRB review.

A new web-based survey was designed by the primary researcher. The primary researcher is requesting approval to send the web-based survey request to all I.S.U. college students enrolled in Spring 2010. Also, the primary researcher is requesting approval to interview the same 9 children and 16 adults who were interviewed for the initial study, using an updated, structured interview guide (attached). *Removed - will be considered in the future. per 2/2/2010 email (VA)*

Part C: Adverse Events and Unforeseen Problems

1. ☐ Yes ☒ No Have there been any adverse events or unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or other people?

If yes, please give them numbers and describe.

If yes, was it reported to the IRB? Date reported
If report was not submitted, please explain why.

2. ☐ Yes ☒ No Have there been any participant complaints?

If yes, please describe.

Attach any reports submitted to NIH or a Data and Safety Monitoring Board. ☐ Attached ☒ N/A

Part D: Informed Consent

1. ☒ Yes ☐ No If a signed Informed Consent Form was required, was Informed Consent obtained from all participants?

If no, please explain.

2. ☒ Yes ☐ No Are all signed Informed Consent Forms on file with the PI?

If no, please explain.

- 3.
- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attached | Submit copy of the currently approved Informed Consent Form and an original unstamped copy (if stamped). If changes have been made, please submit the original, a copy with the changes highlighted, and a copy to be stamped with IRB approval |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Attached | Submit currently approved informational letter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> N/A | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Attached | Submit an unstamped copy of all survey instruments, interview questions, recruitment materials, instructions, and all other material participants will see or hear during their participation so that a current IRB approval stamp can be added. If changes have been made, please submit the original, a copy with the changes highlighted, and a copy to be stamped with IRB approval. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> N/A | |

SECTION III: PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS OR CHANGES

If this application is to request approval for modification or changes to your project, please complete Section I: Key Personnel and Section III.

The submission of a modification form is required whenever changes are made to an approved project. This includes but is not limited to a title change, changes in investigators, resubmission of a grant proposal involving changes to the original proposal, changes in the funding source, changes of an instrument, advertisements, reports from a data safety and monitoring board, addition of a test instrument, etc. **NOTE: All changes must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation, unless the change is necessary to protect the safety of participants.**

1. Does your project require approval from another institution, please attach letters of approval?

☐ Yes ☒ No

2. The following modification(s) are being made (check all that apply):

- ☒ Change in protocol.
☒ Change in type or total number of participants. New anticipated total: 1000 students from I.S.U.
☒ Change in informed consent document.
☐ Change in co-investigator(s). New co-PI name:

Signature of new Co-PI: _____

- ☐ Change in funding source/sponsor. Please attach copy of grant proposal sent to new funding agency.
☒ Other (e.g., change in project title, adding new materials, adding advertisement, etc.) Change in project title; new survey; new consent forms; new assent forms; new structured interview questions.

NOTE: If the change involves a new Principal Investigator, a new Human Subjects Review form must be submitted.

3. Describe the modification(s) indicated above in sufficient detail for evaluation independent of any other documents. When submitting revised documents please submit one clean copy of the new document and a copy with the changes highlighted.

per 2/2/2010 email (b)

~~Follow up interviews will be conducted with the same minor subjects (9 children, 16 adults). However, a web-based survey instrument has also been developed and will be distributed to all I.S.U. college students enrolled during Spring 2010. The anticipated total of new adopted adult (I.S.U. college students) participants to take the proposed survey is 1000.~~

APPENDIX F: SAMPLE OF RESEARCHER'S NOTES

Mixed methodology -
Tashakkori
+ Teddlie ('98)

9-10-09

Methodological triangulation = both qual.
+ quant. data to study same
phenomena within the same study or
in different complementary studies -
pg. 18

Creswell '95 - 4 mixed method designs

- 1) Sequential - 1st a qualitative, then quant.
or vice versa - The 2 phases are separate
- 2) parallel/simultaneous - qual + quant. @
same time
- 3) equivalent status - conducts study
using both quant. + qual. = 'ly
to understand phenom.
- 4) dominant - less dom. - no
- 5) multilevel use of approaches - use diff.
types of methods @ diff. levels of
data aggregation - data analyzed @
study child level, qual. @ family level,
quant. @ adaption level

My research is sequential - my qual. thesis
1st informed the 2nd phase, which will be
either a parallel/simultaneous or equivalent
status!

pg. 19 "T+T" - mixed model studies -
 "products of the pragmatist paradigm
 that combines quant. + qual. approaches
 w/in diff. phases of research process.

See page 19 for multiple applications
 within phases of the study:

Cite
 T, A,
 M, K 96

1. data collection - closed ended
 items + numerical responses +
 open ended on same survey

2. factor analysis of likert scaled items
 from 1 part of survey, use
 constant comp. to analyze
 narrative responses to open-ended
 questions

T+T believe that pragmatists consider
 research Q to be more imp. than
 either the method or worldview that
 underlies the method.

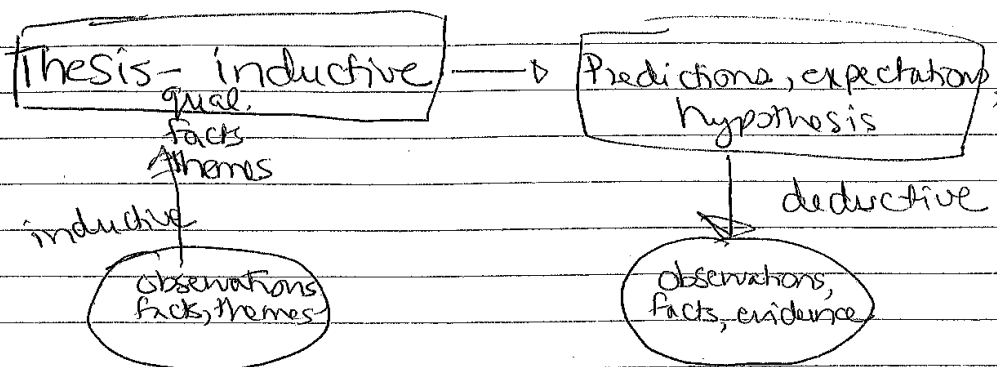
* * method is secondary to RQ + depends
 on phase of ~~the~~ research cycle which is
 ongoing

Pragmatists	
Methods	quant + qual
Logic	ded + inductive
epistemology	obj. + subj. points of view

} Continuum

ontology
 Accept external reality; choose explanations
 that best produce desired outcome

I can't decide if I will be doing a
 factor analysis or how I will analyze
 data.



26 "Pragmatists believe values play a large role in conducting research + in drawing Concl. from their studies"

"1) pragmatists decide what they want to research, guided by their personal value systems - they study what they think is imp.

"2) they study the topic in a way that is congruent to their value systems + use what is most app. for finding answers to RQ esp. research that has imp. social conseq. subscribe to

Why ~~use~~ pragmatism?



1) gives a paradigm that phil. embraces mixed method + model designs

* 2) very practical phil'sophy?

"study what interests + is a value to you, study in the diff. ways you deem approp. + use reserch in ways that can bring + conseq. w/in your value system

Pg 30

q10-27

This method - Quan/Qual - fits my research + RQ + my research interests!!

9.12.09 Because value systems inform mixed methods research... my values = adoption + understanding exp. of adapted indiv. to help inform educators, practitioners, policy makers... Seems sensible to use mixed methods to gather data @ this pt. (mixed)

"Social Science methods should not ⁺ be treated as mutually exclusive alternatives... a diversity of imperfection allows us to combine methods... to compensate for their imperfections."

pg. 41 Denzin (1978) - triangulation involves
* combining data sources to study the same social phenomenon.

a) data triang = use of a variety of data sources in a study

b) methodological triangulation - use of multiple methods to study research problem.

42 Brewer + Hunter (1989) - "multimethod approach to research is superior to monomethod research in that it provides grounds for data triangulation"

Greene et al. (1989) - 5 purposes for using mixed methods

* mixed methods - refers to both data collection techniq. + analyses

9.13.09 I never really considered data triangulation = using quant. + qual. data. Triangulation has a new meaning!

9-15-09 I like the notion of working back
+ forth b/w quant. + qual. data →
inductive + deductive methods to
fully inform research + continually
analyze data!

42. very wordy / too long

more to be deep downs
to each to make reasons

open-ended reasons

under each • • anything
other than never

close top choice can't see
bitcert scale

46- rewaded "adoption plan"



Reread codes, themes, subthemes 5-15.10

- Similar comments throughout
 - grateful, (+) comments, (+) f.a.c.p.
 - opinions

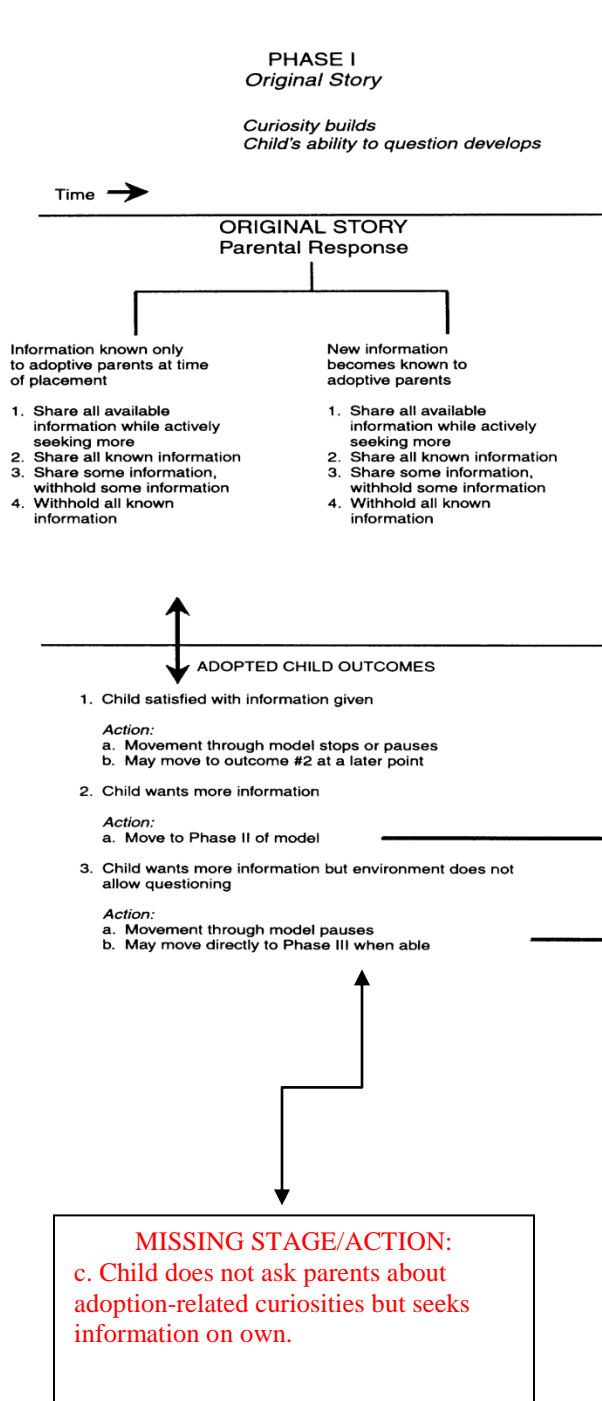
from beginning to end; even where questions were not asked re: particular topic

* What to do w/ additional comments? many of the same that don't answer RQ1, RQ2, 3, or 4?

APPENDIX G: FAC MODEL (Taken From: Wrobel, G. M., Kohler, J. K., Grotevant, H. D., & McRoy, R. G. 2003. The family adoption communication model (FAC): Identifying pathways of adoption-related communication. *Adoption Quarterly*, 7, 53-84.)

Proposed Changes in Text Boxes Denoted by Arrows ().

FIGURE 1. The Family Adoption Communication (FAC) M



Wrobel et al.

FIGURE 1 (continued)

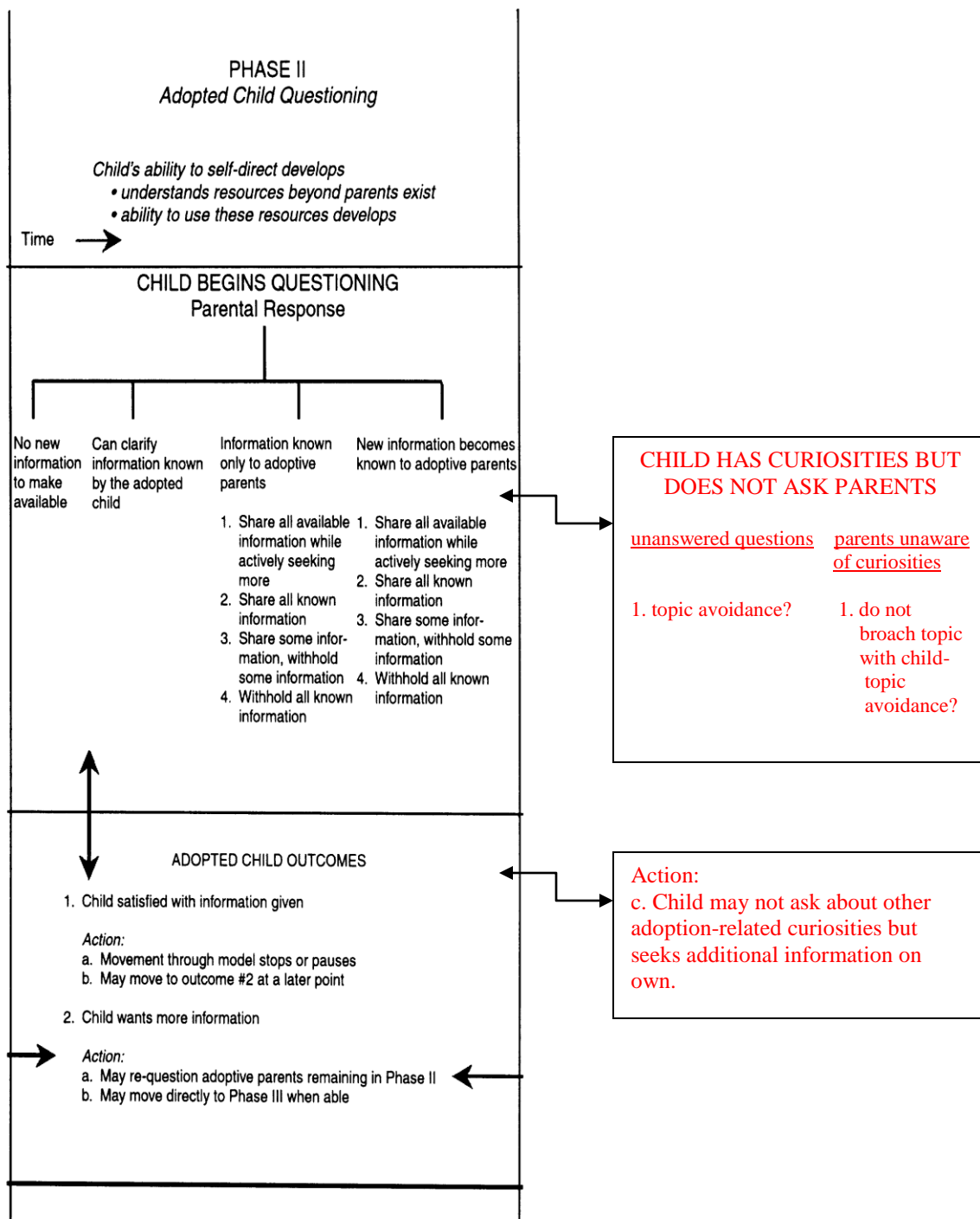


FIGURE 1 (continued)

